ANNA LOUISE STRONG

I SAW THE NEW POLAND

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I SAW THE NEW POLAND

BOOKS BY ANNA LOUISE STRONG

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My Native Land
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Peoples of the USSR
I Saw the New Poland



I SAW THE NEW POLAND

by Anna Louise Strong



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Contents

	Preface Why Poland?	3
I	Diplomatic Car to Poland	11
II	Lublin	36
III	Table Companions in Lublin	59
IV	Chiefs of State	82
V	The New Polish Army	106
VI	Warsaw Front	127
VII	Bor's Uprising	150
VIII	Land Reform	179
IX	Radzyn	202
X	A Government Is Born	226
XI	Warsaw – the Capital	237
XII	United They Stand	259
	Index	273

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I SAW THE NEW POLAND

Why Poland?

CHURCHILL and Stalin stood together in the Government Box when the curtain fell and lights blazed on in the crystal chandeliers. The applause for the ballet shifted abruptly towards the back center of the Moscow Opera House and swelled to a sudden roar. Diplomats of all United Nations, men in uniforms of all the Allied Armies, rose from their seats, demonstratively greeting the Chiefs. Soviet officials and favored factory workers, bending over the railings of galleries, cheered wildly.

That night in early October, 1944, was the first time in all the years of war that I felt the tension in Moscow relax. The British Prime Minister had come for one of those conferences by which the Allies were working out a common program for our postwar world. When he publicly exchanged handshakes with Stalin and then with the American Ambassador, Averell Harriman, and bowed to the plaudits of the crowded theater, harmony – not alone from the orchestra – flooded the air. Over the bitter wrack of war stole a breath of the coming peace.

Days went by. The discussions dragged on longer than expected. It was easy to guess why. We correspondents did not need the hint of the British attaché at one of his daily press conferences, "Since the P.M. is spending four fifths of his time on Poland," to know that this was the snag. We knew that Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, prime minister of the Polish government in London, had come in Churchill's private plane, that Boleslaw Bierut and Edward Osubka-Morawski, the big shots doing the actual job in Poland, had flown in from the Lublin Committee. Four-cornered negotiations were going on. From the universal insistence that they were "progressing" it was clear that they hadn't reached the goal. When Churchill finally received us in the British Ambassador's big study in front of a cheerful log fire and under imposing portraits of the Empire's historic and reigning sovereigns and entertained us with reminiscences of the Boer War, we knew that Poland was still "off record" except for generalities.

Poland was no new caldron of conflict. It has been a source or an object of wars since the Middle Ages. It was both of these in that fateful summer of 1939 when Poland's refusal of Russia's proposals of aid against Hitler blocked the military negotiations between Britain, France, and the USSR. The collapse of that Allied conference gave the green light to the second World War of which Poles were the first victims. Throughout five years of war the same Polish Government's unsettled differences with Moscow

clouded Allied unity, endangering the stability of the future peace.

The immediate problem that brought the British Prime Minister to Moscow arose from the liberation of one third of Poland. In the summer of 1944 the Red Army drove west and entrenched itself on the Vistula, preparing for further advance. A Polish Army of one hundred thousand Poles organized in the Soviet Union took part in these victories. The Soviet Government officially announced that the Red Army would set up no administrative organs in Poland but regarded itself as co-operating with the Polish Army "on the territory of a sovereign, friendly, Allied state." So far so good, but this didn't settle the question: With what Polish authorities was the USSR dealing? What Polish government would it recognize?

The Polish government-in-exile in London was still recognized by Great Britain and the United States. Its hostility to the USSR had been continuous and notorious. It considered the Red Army's advance an invasion rather than a liberation. The Soviet Government had finally broken off relations with these London Poles. Unless some consolidation of the anti-Hitler forces in Poland could be formed that would treat with the Red Army as an ally, Poland might be left in the hour of liberation without any civil government and in the chaos of civil strife.

Farsighted Poles in Poland, realizing this situation, had organized the Krajowa Rada Narodowa (National Council of Poland) at a secret meeting in Warsaw on

New Year's Eve 1943–1944. Delegates came from a score of underground organizations – political parties and partisan detachments – engaged in active resistance to the Nazis and welcoming the Red Army as a liberating ally. They declared for the 1921 Constitution of Poland, modeled on that of democratic France, and against the 1935 Constitution, railroaded by a Nazi-admiring military clique and forming the legal base for the authority of the London Poles. They decided to organize underground county and district radas (councils) prepared to function at the moment of liberation and an underground "People's Army" of partisan bands ready to co-ordinate their activity with that of the Red Army.

Greetings from the new organization were radioed in January 1944 to Moscow, London, and Washington by a weak radio which apparently did not reach. So, after forming many local radas and People's Army detachments, the new Rada sent a delegation across the front to Moscow "to contact all Allied Governments." The American and British Embassies in Moscow paid little attention – it was May of 1944. But Stalin immediately saw that this new Rada could help the Red Army's offensive across Poland and could relieve the Russians of the embarrassment of setting up military government on the territory of a friendly state. He consulted with them and sent arms to their People's Army.

In July, when the Red Army entered Poland, this Rada Narodowa, still underground in German-occu-

pied territory, set up in Lublin a Committee of National Liberation to exercise functions of government in the liberated area. The USSR recognized this Committee as *de facto* civil authority and even transferred to the Rada's jurisdiction the well-equipped Polish Army of one hundred thousand Poles organized in the USSR. The London Poles denounced the new Rada and Committee as puppets of Moscow. Since these London Poles were still recognized by Great Britain and the United States as the government of Poland, the world press exploded into acrimonious discussion. The situation was serious enough to warrant the British Prime Minister's trip to Moscow and the lengthy discussions he held there.

We could not guess at the time that these discussions would drag out for more than eight months, outlasting the war itself, engaging the attention of the Crimea Conference and of the United Nations at San Francisco. They were finally resolved in late June of 1945, by the formation of the Provisional Government of National Unity, based on the Russian-recognized Rada, with the addition of some prominent figures recommended by Britain and the United States.

To me Poland offered the sharpest example of the problems facing all Europe. How can new governments be created out of the chaos left by the Nazis? How can they unite their people into democratic states? What part can be played by those governments-in-exile which have been separated from their coun-

tries for five years? What policies can such states propose to unscramble Hitler's Europe? What economic base and what political forms? What will be their relation to the western democracies? To the USSR? Will their inevitable inner conflicts widen into international friction between their greater Allies? Or will their experiments in adjusting within their own states the different ideals of democracy assist a wider understanding between nations?

My desire to go to Poland began in that moment when the British attaché so airily informed us that Churchill was giving so much of his time to that country. If the Poles were so important it was time to find out why. I sought information in the libraries of the American and British Embassies in Moscow. I found no book of any kind on Poland. The only compiled information was an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and some sections in the *Encyclopedia of World History,* both published years ago. I was shocked at the paucity of printed knowledge. Let's do a book on Poland, I said.

I met the Poles who came to those conferences in Moscow. They were of two quite different kinds. The Poles from London were suave and eloquent; they could build a towering edifice on a few contested facts. I caught them on their claims to those eastern areas; I myself worked in Poland in 1921 for the American Friends' Service and saw those miserable villages of Ukrainian and White Russian peasants, little better than serfs under the Polish lords of the big estates.

But the London Poles twisted these things very adroitly. They convinced me that Poles are smooth diplomats, difficult to outmaneuver except by another Pole.

The Poles from Lublin – later from Warsaw – convinced me of something quite different, that Poles can be frank and honest men. Not the kind one expects in a semifeudal Eastern Europe but the kind one meets on Western American plains or anywhere in the world where there is hard, straightforward work to do. They seemed to be realists and moderns. They understood that a country the size of Poland cannot prosper by playing one big power against the other but must live in friendly relations with its great eastern neighbor; that whatever past conflicts interfere with this must be quickly settled and not kept alive. They intended to build a democratic Poland and to be independent, or as nearly so as a nation may in today's interdependent world.

These are problems not only for Poland but for all of us. At the moment Poland faces them squarely in a new form. So when they invited: "Come to Poland, see for yourself our difficulties and the ways we try to meet them," I decided to go.

The urgent need for firsthand information about Poland's immediate problems led me to write this brief account of what I saw and experienced in that country, with only enough historical reference to make those experiences understandable. I had the good fortune to be the only writer from America or

from the Western world in Poland during the period which Poles in days to come may think of as a new beginning in their history.

ANNA LOUISE STRONG

July 1, 1945

CHAPTER I

Diplomatic Car to Poland

(November 1944)

HAVE your baggage down on the sidewalk in front of the Metropole. The plane is leaving at once. Our car will pick you up in passing. Look for the white-red flag over the fender."

It was the Polish Embassy in Moscow speaking. I hastened down to the frost-covered sidewalk with glad assurance. Only four hours by plane! Lublin by afternoon! A friendly diplomatic courier tossed my baggage on top of his two big bundles of "important documents" that "had to get to Lublin right away." Thrilled by the thought of what might be in those documents I forgot to notice the mudstained, battered outside wrappings; they might have told me what to expect.

We sat three hours at the airport. "Fog over Minsk," they said. At noon we came back to the Metropole. "Too late now to make it by daylight; we'll try tomorrow again." So said the courier, who had been to the airport three mornings already. "Fog over Minsk" was chronic. The flight from Moscow to Poland crosses the largest swamps in Europe, several

hundred square miles of damp. Here the moist winds from the Baltic and the distant Atlantic Gulf Stream meet the chill of the Russian plain. Yet the chronic fog is a thin one; it may always clear by noon. So daily we waited at the airport because there was hourly hope. Just as there was hourly hope that all those other fogs between Moscow and Poland might clear.

My fourth attempt was different. A party at the Polish Embassy the previous night in honor of Poland's Independence Day made everybody late. We reached the field to find the propeller whirling. Two hundred feet from us the plane was ready to start. But the gate was closed and the guards would not let us through. We looked on fuming while the plane took off.

"Why don't you go by train?" they asked at the Polish Telegraph Agency — "Polpress" for short. I had previously refused because I knew that under war conditions the train took at least three days; but I had spent four already "going by plane." Then I learned that a diplomatic car was leaving for Lublin carrying Dr. Jendrychowski, then Polish representative in Moscow,[1] Captain Modzilewski, then chief of Polpress,[2] some professors from Vilna and Lvov going to join the Committee of National Liberation, and sev-

[1] Dr. Jendrychowski is now Polish representative in France.

[2] Colonel Modzilewski is at present Polish Ambassador to the USSR.

eral Polish officers bound for the Polish Army. Three days of diplomatic comfort combined with conversation would not be bad.

That night I groped my way through a dimly lighted station — blackout was strictly enforced in Moscow though the front was three days' train journey away — and found a lively crowd around the entrance to an ordinary "hard seats" car. It was a shock. The car was the old-fashioned kind in which one could not sit fully erect in the lower berth when the upper berth was down. Thin mattresses on the solid wood of the bunks were the only concessions to the diplomats. Nobody else was complaining, so I spread my sleeping bag to cushion the mattress, thankful that I had a lower berth.

I was at first ashamed at the amount of my baggage. Besides my sleeping bag and a brief case containing three days' food, which I kept under the pillow, I had an old-fashioned carryall and a box with paper, typewriter, and extra rations stowed away in the compartment's spacious upper shelf. It was one piece more than I could carry by myself, which is inadvisable when traveling to a war. My conscience cleared when two other women entered, each with twice the baggage I had brought. "Get up," commanded the porter and I discovered that my lower berth also covered a large baggage compartment.

The two women began to arrange themselves. One was the blonde wife of a Polish official, taking the family possessions back to Lublin after five years as a

refugee in the USSR. The other was a middle-aged teacher, formerly of Warsaw, who had been in Siberia five years and was now returning. Just before the train left, a dark-haired Jewess strode in, followed by two porters with eight pieces of baggage, whose apparent weight indicated a quantity of books.

The other two drew back perceptibly. Was it normal resistance to overcrowding or reaction to the newcomer's race? Then their manner changed to an almost too obvious acceptance, as if they were consciously saying: "Poland is to be democratic, now! Jews are equal citizens now! Not for nothing have we spent five years in the USSR!"

The last four suitcases went on the foot of the newcomer's bunk – the one above me. This left her no room to stretch out straight, for the entire journey. It also meant that her berth could never be raised and that I should at no time be able to sit completely erect.

Four days, not three, we jogged southwest along a partially repaired railroad. The main line through Minsk was either ruined or more probably in use by the Red Army; naturally they didn't tell us which. We went a long way around, by Kiev. A thousand miles of devastated fields, charred villages, gaunt skeleton towns, wrecked bridges, burned railway stations. There is nothing resembling this in Western Europe, where the Germans to some extent observed the so-called laws of war. In all Slav lands they pursued a policy of national extermination, driving off cattle,

deporting inhabitants, and burning what was left behind.

Curled in the corner of my berth nearest the window I listened to the women's discussion of war's effect on family life. I entered an inner world as grim as those outer ruins through which our train was passing.

"My sister's little boy of six keeps trying to join the army," said the Polish official's wife. "He saw his father killed right in front of their home. He keeps begging the soldiers to take him. He says to his mother: 'Mamma, I must go.' "

The teacher knew a man who killed his wife to keep her from falling into the enemy's hands. "They were fleeing across a field near Orel. The Germans were going to catch them; the woman couldn't keep up. The man tried to help her along but it was useless. So he shot her and reached the woods himself to join the partisans. Two years later he told me of it, saying: 'It was the only thing to do.' "

The Jewess at first said little. It was the second morning that we heard her story. She was a doctor; when the German invasion of the USSR began she was attending a medical congress in Odessa. She escaped eastward to Central Asia. Her husband, her mother, her sisters and brothers and their children, had all been massacred in a little town near Lvov.

"In England and America you find it hard to believe these stories." She was speaking directly to me. "That doesn't surprise me. I myself wouldn't

believe them when I was working as doctor on a collective farm near Samarkand. I wouldn't even read those official reports on atrocities. Then the Red Army freed my home town and I got direct word. I've only one thing to be glad of. It was swift death right at home. The Germans just came and killed. They didn't have the long agony of those who were dragged away to death camps like Maidanek."

At Kiev our car was shunted to a sidetrack to await a Lublin connection. I went uptown to see the ruins along Kreschatik, that curving thoroughfare once world-renowned for beauty. The Germans had blown up the buildings systematically, firing them before they left. Gangs of German war prisoners were clearing the ruins. Most of the Ukrainians passed without looking at them.

I looked for Ed Snow at the Intourist Hotel; he had left Moscow a day before me on a specially arranged trip to Kiev, not knowing that my trip to Poland would have Kiev thrown in. Ed was out but my first inquiries convinced the manager that as Ed's friend I had the right to buy breakfast at his hotel. I succeeded in getting an omelet and tea for myself and the Polish officer accompanying me — our first hot meal in two days.

Handsome, intelligent looking Captain Welker, with three stars on his epaulets, bore a few traces of the years he had spent in concentration camps, first in France and then in Africa. He went to war with the Nazis early. In 1937 he fought in Spain. When

Spanish democracy was beaten, Welker was among those who fled over the French border only to be interned. Later, when the Germans took Paris, he was sent to Africa to make bricks and haul stones in the desert on a ration of five slices of bread and two plates of thin vegetable soup a day.

"Nearly twenty thousand Poles fought for the Spanish democracy," he told me. "Only a handful survived. We were fifteen hundred when we came over the border of France in 1939. We were two hundred when we were sent to Africa. The camp commandant there was a French fascist who beat prisoners personally with his cane. He hated us for fighting in Spain."

When the Americans landed in Africa, the Poles in the camp applied as "remnants of the Dombrowski Brigade" wishing now to fight for Poland. A representative came from the Polish government-in-exile in London, told them that they had lost their Polish citizenship by fighting for the Spanish Loyalists, but that he would investigate them one by one.

He asked: "Would you fight against Stalin?"

"But he is our ally!" they protested.

"It's not your business to have politics. Soldiers must fight where they are told." Unconvinced of their reliability, he accepted only a few. The others were put in a British labor battalion.

Finally a Soviet consul reached Africa. Word spread of the Polish army being formed in the USSR. "We volunteered at once. Somebody somewhere was sabo-

taging, for it took a year to get released from those labor battalions. At last we were let go. In the USSR they trained me for a flyer. I've been fighting in the Polish air force two months. This is the third time I tried to fight for Poland: once from France in 1939 and once from Africa and now from the USSR. Only the Russians would let me. In our very first battle, one of our International Brigadiers, Major Hibner, won the order 'Hero of the USSR.' "

As we went back to the train he added: "For a hundred and fifty years — ever since Kosciusko fought for your American Revolution — there have been Poles fighting for other countries' freedom. Now we shall have our chance to fight for Poland and make Poland really free!"

Beyond Kiev we were part of a freight train; our diplomatic car was coupled between cars of hay. We made long stops in open fields. Snow alternated with mud on the ground. The car grew cold; neither the lights nor the heating system functioned. Jokes arose that we were "waiting for the horses," or that "there is still two days' supply of hay in Lublin so we are not moving yet." We had all brought food, but had counted on finding boiling water for tea. The stations that usually supplied this were ruined; our conductor's utmost efforts gave us tea only once a day.

The warmth of the passengers made up for the physical discomfort. They were exiles coming home from all parts of the earth. They moved from compartment to compartment getting acquainted and

sharing provisions; they seemed pleased that I, an American ally, was going to Poland too.

The sandy-haired teacher in my compartment had fled from Warsaw to Lvov in 1939 and from Lvov to Siberia in 1941. " 'Twice accursed,' we used to say of the unlucky. But now we say 'twice a refugee.' " She had clearly not lost her sense of humor.

Helene — that was her first name, and her last name I never could pronounce — had suffered in her long migration but had learned much. "For the first time I met the Russian people directly and they were very kind and good. They had kitchens giving us food at every station; they seemed to understand the feelings of people who had to leave home and run away. But the big, big spaces between the stations frightened me; those tremendous, lonesome prairies made me nervous. . . .

"When I came to Chuvash and saw the Mongol-like faces, I felt I was at the end of the world. But the school director talked like a European. He was glad that I knew German and English; he offered me a choice of jobs teaching either language. . . . I had trouble with the Chuvash children. They refused to learn that 'Nazi tongue' even though I explained that it was also the tongue of Goethe and Schiller. I wouldn't do that now. I myself now hate the German language after all those death camps at Maidanek and Tremblinka. But when the war began I thought only a few Nazis were to blame for it all."

Helene worked on a farm in the summer of 1942.

"Everyone was working on farms that summer and I wanted to come closer to the children." The following year she joined the "Union of Polish Patriots" and taught in a Polish school. "That was when the Poles in Russia began to get together. Wanda Wasilewska organized a Polish newspaper and I wrote to it. They also organized a Polish army and many of my former students joined. Two students who fled with me from Lvov have already died in battle; another lost both legs in the taking of Praga." Helene sighed deeply; then she resumed: —

"I am going back to Poland as a teacher to make Poland democratic. It is hard to make democrats of grownups but I like to make democrats of children. That will be my work."

Professor Stanislaw Mazur in the next compartment was going to Lublin on behalf of the Poles of Lvov. He was a tall, gaunt man with the forehead of a thinker, but with deep lines marking his lean face. His shabby overcoat, once of good cut and material, hung loosely on him as if he had lost weight. As a member of the mathematics faculty of the Lvov University since 1930, he had seen that city's eventful history of recent years.

"For a week in 1939 our city held out against the Germans. Then the Red Army came from the east. The Lvov garrison commander surrendered to the Russians saying: 'The Polish Government has gone with the General Staff and I have no orders to fight the Russians.' Most of us in Lvov thought there

would be a conflict right then between the Red Army and the Germans. Many in the Red Army thought so too. But the Germans withdrew and the frontier was formed leaving Lvov inside the USSR. The city was swollen with a couple of hundred thousand refugees."

Mazur was agreeably surprised by the growth of his university during those two years of Soviet rule. "Our physics-mathematics department increased from three full professors to ten; we added some from Warsaw and a Jew and a Ukrainian from Lvov who could not have held such posts in prewar Poland because of nationality. Our graduate fellows, formerly unpaid, were quite well paid. Even students got stipends. Teaching was in Polish or Ukrainian according to the teacher's choice. Then the Germans came and closed down everything.

"Five of our mathematics professors were shot in the first days. Others hid; I myself was hiding for two years. I sought places with two entrances; once the police came to the front door and I got out the back. My two sisters helped me; they were married to a baker and a merchant. These were not so much persecuted, for the Germans sought especially to destroy Polish intellectuals. There were thirty mathematics teachers of all grades in Lvov when the Germans came. There are only fifteen left.

"Three of our mathematics professors, Banach, Knastrac, and Orlicz, served as 'lice-food' in Professor Weigel's antityphus institutes where vaccine was developed through the bodies of lice. The process was

very expensive and only produced enough vaccine for German officers. The lice had to be fed on human beings. Those professors went every day to receive five hundred bites. In six months they were all ill."

A million or more Poles, Mazur stated, in the area that was formerly Eastern Poland but that now had become Western Ukraine, were being given their choice of country. Most of them he thought would go to Poland if they were assured of jobs or land. Poles in Lvov were "much upset" that the city was not to be included in Poland. "But what can you do? Poles predominate in the city proper which has old connections with our history and culture; but the surrounding country is Ukrainian. Lvov is a Polish island in a Ukrainian sea."

Glad to get the testimony of a mathematician on this much-debated question, I asked Mazur about conflicting population figures. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gave 56.6 per cent Poles in the "Lvov *voyevodstwo*" in 1921. Other authorities, including the London *Times,* stated that there were only two and a half million Poles in a total population of eleven million in East Poland before the war.

"The figures are not as contradictory as they seem," he answered. "It depends on where you draw the border. That Eastern Poland was always predominantly Ukrainian and White Russian. It was not given to Poland by the Treaty of Versailles. At that time a committee under the British Lord Curzon worked out an ethnographic border, since known as the 'Curzon

Line.' East of that line, where Poles were only a small minority, the figures of *The Times* are correct. But landlords there were Polish; under their influence the Pilsudski government took the territory from Soviet Russia in 1920 by war. The figures given by the *Britannica* for the Lvov *voyevodstwo* were artificially secured by including in the district a Polish area to the west. In 1939 the Russians fixed a strategic border between themselves and the Germans at the river San. Now they are giving some of this territory back to Poland. It is not easy to determine such a border, since Ukrainian and Polish populations overlap."

To my question whether Professor Mazur himself intended to remain in Lvov or go to Poland permanently, he replied that he had not yet decided. "If we can really make a democratic Poland, I want to take part in it. But if it is to be such a Poland as we had before the war, then I shall stay in Lvov where I have a good job and a good apartment. In any case I hope the postwar relations will not make iron barriers between countries."

Professor Jan Dembowski of Vilno faced a similar problem. A biologist of renown in the field of animal psychology — he worked in 1926–1927 in the United States under the Rockefeller Foundation in the marine biological station at Woods Hole — he was on the black list of Home Army terrorists in Vilno, marked for assassination. For this reason he was at first uncommunicative and a bit nervous, being essentially a scientist who did not wish to take part in a

political fight. He was going to Lublin to help organize science teaching, but he did not know whether he would remain in Poland or return to Moscow where he was offered a good scientific job.

"After thirty years of scientific work," he told me finally, "one wants to leave something behind one. The war stopped my science; under German occupation I worked as an office clerk. We professors collected our students in small groups and taught them secretly. We went from apartment to apartment, for it increased the danger to be seen too often in the same place; if caught, it would have meant death or at least concentration camp for all of us. After these wasted years, I want a few years of scientific work before I die; Moscow universities offer me this. I am not sure what science there will be in Poland. I am going to Lublin to find out. . . .

"I am no prophet." He stared at me through his black-rimmed spectacles when I asked him what he thought would happen in Poland now. "In the long run Poland will be democratic because the peasants are getting the land. But democracy will not be easy; they will have to hang some incorrigibles first." He sighed, as if he found it hard to be a scientist in such an epoch.

Professor Dembowski's analysis of the "Vilno problem" — which had put him on the "death list" of the Polish terrorists — was similar to Professor Mazur's explanation of Lvov. "Vilno has a long, complex history. Lithuanians claim that their Prince Gedymin

founded it, but excavations show that it antedated Gedymin by hundreds of years. Probably it was originally a White Russian settlement. It was Lithuania's capital in the Middle Ages but it has been Polish since. The city is today largely Polish, but surrounded by White Russians and Lithuanians. There is no way to join it to Poland; geography prevents."

A taciturn, nervous fellow who shared Dembowski's compartment listened condescendingly to the professor's difficulties. Stanislaw Zelent, engineer and graduate of Warsaw Polytechnic — he had just been selecting a press in Moscow for the Polish Government's official newspaper — had faced the ultimate in horrors. He had been confined in Maidanek "death camp" for nearly two years, surviving only because the Germans used his engineering skill to design structures in the camp.

"I am no longer a normal human being," he told me. "Nobody who endured Maidanek can be normal again."

Zelent had seen the day in November 1943 when they killed in Maidanek "eighteen thousand Jews in a single batch." He had been under a camp commandant, Peter Wertzer, who "liked to kill by jumping with his boots on a prostrate man's belly, then on his chest, and then with his heel on the throat. He did this in the square in front of everybody to put the fear into us.

"The worst wasn't the physical hardship or even the beatings. It was the mental atmosphere that poi-

soned everyone. The strain of knowing that any minute they might decide to kill you. The humiliating sense that everything you did was bad because you were a Slav dog, a Slav pig, an inferior creature. Your belief in humanity was destroyed."

Zelent had kept some self-respect alive by sabotaging. Even this tortured slave found a way to handicap the Nazi war machine. "There were six 'fields' in the camp, and their commandants competed. If one field got nice sidewalks, the others wanted them too. I designed foundations and sidewalks to use as much cement as possible, since this was a deficit article needed for the war. By playing on their mutual competition, I got them wasting cement. In the fifth year of war I used up several extra carloads on one field. And all the other fields were copying my designs!"

His eyes glared at me. "What shatters me now is that there exist people like the Americans and British who do not even believe the things that we endured; and therefore there is no hope of justice. If I hear that anybody says Maidanek death camp couldn't exist, then I want to take a knife and kill that person."

The glare faded from his eyes as he apologized: "I told you that I was not normal any more." If I had doubted the horrors of Maidanek, I should not have dared to say so then.

I wandered into the next compartment and found the handsome Captain Welker and two other veterans of the Spanish war exchanging reminiscences with a

new comrade. Josef Filipczyk also wore the uniform of the new Polish Army, but had come to it by a different route. He had joined Anders's army in the USSR and deserted it in Irak, risking his life to get back to the Soviet Union to fight for Poland.

Josef's early life was made by the Versailles Treaty, which divided between Germany and Poland the Silesia in which he lived. There were three uprisings against the Germans. Josef, a boy of fourteen, took part in the third. "I went on a truck that carried arms to the uprising. The people cheered and gave us enormous loaves of bread. The French soldiers were our friends but not the British. Lloyd George didn't want to give Poland too much, he opposed Clemenceau." It was a voice from the long past speaking. British, French, Italian soldiers all guaranteed the "plebiscite," the people's right to vote. To Josef the plebiscite was not voting but battle.

He grew up in the mines and graduated to the steel mills. He married and had a son. He learned, the hard way, what foreign ownership of a country's resources meant. "Foreign owners closed our mines to raise the price of coal in other countries so that their other mines could profit. The Polish Government was never strong enough to enforce laws against them; it was they who enforced their will against the Polish Government. The people tried every way to get democracy and couldn't. So we came to 1939 and the war."

War made Josef a refugee in the Urals. He got a

job in a steel works near Perm. Then the Germans attacked the USSR and Josef was drafted into the army of Poles formed in the Soviet Union under General Anders, representative of the Polish government-in-exile.

"At first everyone in the army expected to go to the front and win back Poland. But when the Germans reached Stalingrad, Anders made no secret of his belief that the Russians couldn't hold. He took his army to Iran and later to Irak. For more than a year in Irak we had no arms and there was no talk of the front. The talk was 'Let the Bolsheviks feel the German conquest! When both are worn out we will have a Poland from the Black to the Baltic Sea.'

"Then we began to hear by radio of the new Polish army forming in the USSR. They were fighting their way towards Poland while we rotted in Irak. When we heard that the Kosciusko Division broke the German lines at Lenina, we thought: 'Why aren't we there?' A group of officers and noncoms wrote a telegram of greeting to General Berling's army in Russia. Anders had them all arrested and thrown into an old Palestine jail."

Fed up with inaction, Josef Filipczyk deserted in order to seek the war. It took him a year to get there, a year spent in evading the military police. Some Canadians helped him towards India. The "Americans weren't too strict" on the autos through Iran. He was stuck a long time in Teheran, where he had to live illegally, "fearing the British military police."

Finally a representative of the Union of Polish Patriots came from Moscow, and helped him and others through.

"Many thought like me. . . . Many wished me well and gave me money for the road. But not many decided to desert as I did, for it was a choice of life or death. Several were caught and shot, only a handful got through. I'm in luck to be fighting for Poland. So many Poles never got the chance!"

A white-haired old man with ruddy cheeks, sparkling blue eyes, and vivacious manner also thought himself lucky to fight for Poland. Engineer M. Okecki (pronounced Okenski), who occupied the end compartment, had come from Afghanistan for the chance. He had blown in the savings of a lifetime and thrown over a job that meant security. The blatant happiness with which he wandered through our chilly compartments, congratulating everybody, was almost enough to warm the car.

"I have had one life and it was a good one. Now at sixty years, a new life begins for me!"

From early years Okecki had been a crosser of frontiers. Born in Warsaw, he finished a German secondary school in Darmstadt and an engineering college in Petersburg. He was chief of a road section of the Tsar's army in the first World War and saw the Russian Revolution in its capital. As councilor for the Ministry of Public Works in the new Republic of Poland, a post which he technically held till the second World War, he fixed frontiers in Silesia,

studied transport problems in Great Britain, and attended the international congress on roads in Washington in 1930.

"The American Government was very good to us. Mr. McDonald, your chief of road administration — the greatest man in the world for roads — gave us a very fine time. I was elected a vice-president of the congress."

The League of Nations asked Okecki to work in its transit section. He was sent by them to China where he built hundreds of miles of roads and received a high decoration from Chiang Kai-shek. "The Chinese are very fine people. I was there four years." He came back by way of America, crossing the continent in a car to study American roads for the League of Nations. "I learned a lot in Arizona and Texas."

At home in prewar Poland Okecki was less successful. "I saw only misery and small policies and I couldn't agree. I wanted three big strategic highways because it was clear that our railroads would be bombed out of use in a war. I wanted plenty of good third-grade roads to connect the farms with the market and give our peasants a good life. I wanted well-developed motor transport so that in war our life could not be suddenly stopped.

"I spoke to our military men, but they were in love with cavalry and with the poetry of the beautiful horse! I published a book on roads and the minister was furious. I had too many friends to be put in jail just for a book on roads; but they made my work

very unpleasant and sought chances to get rid of me. Then came our treaty with the Afghans giving them technical help. I was willing to go to Afghanistan and the ministry was very glad to send me. I took my best assistant, Frank Wychrzycki, to give him a chance to develop, for in prewar Poland there was great decadence of our engineers."

Okecki liked the Afghans. "They have a very ancient culture; they are hospitable and appreciative." It seems the Afghans liked Okecki too. They sent him to Europe in early 1939 to pick out forty or fifty engineers for a new ministry of public works. He brought back forty-five, most of whom were Poles. He invited Germans also but they wouldn't work under Okecki. They smelled the coming war.

When the World War broke across Poland, Okecki and his staff telegraphed to place themselves at their country's disposal. They were told to wait. In a fortnight it was over. There was no Poland left. Okecki kept on building roads for the Afghans, with a great void in his heart. He built one hundred and forty bridges and the first road-tunnels the Afghans had ever seen. And then to Okecki, in faraway Kabul, the gospel of Wanda Wasilewska came.

"I heard that Poles were organizing in Russia and that Russians were giving them help. I got their newspaper and I said: This is salvation for Poland. For hundreds of years we ruined ourselves fighting the Russians and now we are going to be friends."

Okecki wrote at once to Wanda Wasilewska and

her Union of Polish Patriots that he was ready to work for Poland in any way and at any time they desired. No answer came for a year. The Polish vice-consul in Kabul – appointed by the Poles in London – called Okecki a traitor and took his diplomatic passport away. After a long time he got a passport again "because the Afghans interceded with the British," but it wasn't a diplomatic passport any more.

"It was all because I wanted to be friends with the Bolsheviks," explained Okecki. "Tell me," he asked anxiously, "what is so wrong with the Bolsheviks? All the ones I ever met were very nice to me!"

In the summer of 1944 the Soviet Embassy in Kabul sent for Okecki. "We have a transit visa for you to Poland. It seems they want you there."

Okecki had twenty thousand men working for him in Afghanistan. He was Chief Engineer of Roads. He hadn't the faintest idea who wanted him in Poland or whether they offered him a job. But he knew that this was "the greatest moment of our history, when the mistakes of centuries will be righted." And he had a chance to be there.

The Afghan Prime Minister sent for Okecki and talked with him for an hour. He said: "Perhaps this is too soon to go to Poland . . . perhaps you'll be disappointed . . . after all you are sixty years old." He said: "You are irreplaceable here." He offered to double Okecki's salary, to bring his family from Poland; to send his children abroad to study, to give him a life pension, to give him a house and land.

Okecki replied: "*Sadrazam* — Prime Minister — Afghanistan is my second motherland. If there wasn't this war, I'd stay here fifteen years. But you yourself came to Kabul in a revolution. If you were a Pole and your country was as Poland is, what would you do?"

Two tears rolled down the Afghan minister's cheeks as he answered: "I am your father and your brother. Go with God!"

Okecki bought himself two tons of baggage — all that he thought he might need for the rest of his life — and it was all carried from his house to the autos by Afghan cabinet ministers. The people of the East knew how to appreciate Okecki's quality of soul. The governor of Kabul and one hundred and fifty Afghan officials said good-bye to him and many of them were weeping. But not a single Pole from the Polish colony in Kabul saw him off. "They were afraid of that Polish vice-consul," opined Okecki.

When Okecki reached the Soviet frontier in Central Asia he changed his life's savings — till then in dollars — into rubles at the official rate. No sensible tourist ever does this, but Okecki supposed it was the proper thing. He blew it all in for his expenses in Russia, which he paid at commercial prices. To another man this would have been a major tragedy, but to Okecki the loss of his life's savings was an incidental price for reaching Poland in her hour of need.

"What is the matter with those Poles in London? When Mikolajczyk had the chance to come to Poland,

how could he bear to stay away?" This was his simple view of Polish politics. All the way across the USSR he wondered who had arranged for him that transit visa; he hoped it was Wanda herself, his chosen prophetess. "She wrote such clean, patriotic tales for children before the war!"

Frank Wychrzycki, with his wife and two children, shared the older engineer's compartment. His devotion to Okecki was that of a son. Okecki had opened the world to Frank and his family. Frank's wife had been only a Polish housewife; now she had taught the daughters of a king! She was instructress in the first girl's school in Afghanistan, a closed school to which girls came veiled through the streets of Kabul. The king's daughters came to that school together with daughters of poor people, because the Afghans also were going in for democracy!

Late on the last afternoon Okecki invited me to his compartment. "We are celebrating our crossing of the frontier."

It was nearly dusk when we gathered, a dozen people crowded into a space for six, filling the seats and the upper berths and the standing-room near the door. On the tiny table near the window a fragrant cherry brandy — brought from Iran by the International Brigadiers — was poured into every kind of container: tea glasses from the conductress, traveling mugs of passengers, and a half dozen beautiful Chinese goblets without handles, brought from Afghanistan by Okecki, dark outside and glazed white within.

"To drink to our return," said Okecki.

We halted for some time at the frontier. In the deepening dusk a sleety rain beat into muddy ditches. A field was ragged with stubble, woods were barely seen against the leaden sky. Off to the left in the mud stood a hut with straw-thatched roof and broken windows. There was no light in the hut; there was no light in our car.

We let off the Russian frontier officials at last. Through the window I saw their vague figures stumbling past in the mud. The train moved jerkily. Then across the drab dusk grew a pale sheet of water, swollen with rain and spilling into disorderly ditches; into it tilted the black jagged lines of a broken bridge.

Inside the compartment the faces disappeared into shadow. Only the white hands outstretched with the circling cups were seen, and only the white inside of the Chinese goblets with the dark Iranian wine.

"How beautiful is our Poland!" said a voice in the darkness. My breath stopped; what was there to say? Outside a merciful night was veiling the dreary desolation. The edge between earth and sky had vanished. Then the conductress came with a single candle. I saw Okecki's face; it was that of a pilgrim who comes to the Holy City!

So we came over the river into the ruined land.

CHAPTER II

Lublin

LUBLIN was an island of organized life in a sea of chaos. The dramatic break-through of the Red Army, sweeping across the eastern third of Poland in July, had taken the city almost intact. The German guards in the city jail had had time to slaughter the prisoners; the jailyard was crowded with relatives weeping over a thousand corpses when the Red Army marched in. There had not, however, been time to destroy many buildings; so this rather stodgy, provincial city of Southern Poland was best equipped of all Polish cities thus far liberated to become a center of government. It had been, incidentally, the first brief capital of the Polish Republic when, after more than a century of partition, Poland was reborn in 1918.

Autos from the Polish Foreign Office met our train and distributed us to our places of abode. A courteous officer approached me: "You will come to the Committee." I was about to protest that I wanted first a hotel with a bath and a rest. But from the looks of

respect among my fellow passengers I gathered that "the Committee" was better than a hotel.

We sped through the streets of a fair-sized, rather down-at-heels city, climbed a slight rise and drew up before an ordinary apartment house in the back yard of two similar houses. When I found myself on the third floor in the home of a Polish teacher, I thought there was some mistake. My escort, however, was assigning me a room here; he was telling the maid to make a fire in my Holland stove and promising that "the Committee" would supply the coal. This building, one of the best apartment houses in town, had been occupied by Germans for five years and was now taken over for employees and guests of the Committee of National Liberation. It was really more comfortable than any Lublin hotel.

Most important of all, there was heat available; it was not too difficult to get fuel for a Holland stove. The larger hotels were unheated; Lublin – cut off by the front from Silesia – suffered acute shortage of coal. My room was also well lighted and furnished with a fairly comfortable couch and a commodious desk. A large round table, now shoved awkwardly against the wall, indicated that this had once been the dining room. My host with his wife and small son occupied the larger room adjacent. Across the hall was a large kitchen with an alcove in which a willing housemaid lived. Employed by the teacher's family, she was ready to do odd jobs for me.

Fearing that I was crowding them, I tried to apolo-

gize in all the languages I knew. They understood a few words of Russian and somewhat more of German, which, however, they did not wish to speak. They made it plain that I was "no inconvenience" and that there would be "no rent." My hostess even got out her best lace-covered bedding as a sign that she was glad I was there. I put this down at first to excessive hospitality, but within a few days I realized that under prevailing housing conditions, and having moved into the building on the heels of departing Nazis and without anybody's permission, they could not possibly hope to keep more than one room. They were really glad when the other was taken by a single, temporary guest and not by a permanent family.

Half a block away stood a large three-story office building, headquarters for the Committee of National Liberation. To enter you presented a pass to a sentry; once inside, you wandered informally into any department you chose, finding a condensed edition of all usual functions of government. A smaller building across the street with a larger number of sentries housed the Polish General Staff. Cottages strung along the block offered dining facilities for the civil and military services. I was assigned to a dining room directly across the street.

This little cluster of buildings on a slight elevation near the center of Lublin — the Committee, the General Staff, the dining rooms and apartments — formed the administrative center of that third of Poland already liberated by the Red Army. In those wintry

days of November and December, 1944, they were headquarters for a rapidly growing Polish army, an epoch-making "land reform," and for all those activities of finance, health, education, and policing which we commonly include under government.

Nobody, however, in Lublin used the term "government" except carelessly. Everybody conscientiously said "the Committee." The full term "Polish Committee of National Liberation" — like similar titles in France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria — implied a limited function and a definite term. In Poland they argued that this modest title would make it easier to combine eventually with some members from the government-in-exile in London.

The various departments in the large three-story building similarly were not given the title "ministry," common in European lands. They were called "resorts," a word implying, as it does in English, a place where you go for a specific purpose. "Health resort" being where you go for health, "school resort" becomes where you go for schools. For finance, foreign affairs, labor, industry, and agriculture, you went to the appropriate "resort." Nearly all of them were located in this single building, where they were getting rapidly acquainted with each other.

In easy walking distance from the Committee buildings were other centers which I soon came to know. Some two blocks down was Cracow Street, the main through highway, leading in both directions to squares where parades and meetings were frequent,

to halls and theaters for congresses of all kinds, to buildings used as headquarters for political parties, trade-unions, and administrative activities.

I learned the way at once to the Committee's official newspaper, the *Rzeczpospolita,* which, with the official radio station, occupied a large building on Cracow Street just across from a small park. The dynamic editor, Borecza, was easily accessible. He proved to be a mine of information and a tireless maker of connections and appointments with anyone I wished to see. The difficulty in dealing with him was that there were commonly at least six people in his office and two more on his telephone wires, all of whom he was handling at once. This was stimulating but exhausting; unless one fought hard for attention, a perpetual-motion chain of other applicants got it instead.

People were coming to Lublin from all over Poland and from many parts of the world. Refugees from ruined towns and villages came for jobs or merely for shelter. Engineers, scientists, soldiers came to offer their services or just to see what this new administration would do. Hundreds of village leaders came with their problems, slept in rows of cots or simply on piles of straw in unheated buildings, consulted the various "resorts" or the political parties, and took short courses to become organizers of co-operatives, of schools, or of land reform. Congresses met, discussed, and passed resolutions. Trade-unions, co-operatives, political parties strove to reorganize the life that had been five years suppressed.

The pain and the chaos came not only from war that had twice swept the country but from the isolation of five years under Nazi rule. Whenever I sat at a press table in any public gathering, people came to me in the hope that, as an American, I might somehow connect them with the larger world.

Four such applicants came in a single half-hour intermission during the trial of Maidanek war criminals in a large and crowded hall. The first was a soldier lad from Vilno who wanted to reach a mother in Siberia and a father who had gone with Anders's army and who might be in Italy or Palestine. The next was a worn-looking Jewish woman who had once been handsome and who wanted somehow to get word to a brother in Tel Aviv that their mother, father, two sisters, and a dozen relatives had been murdered by the Nazis, but that she, with her husband and children, was alive. "Saved by a Polish peasant woman who hid us in her cellar four years."

A stalwart man from Transylvania next begged me to get a postcard through to his village where he had left a five-year-old son. Picked up by the Germans during their summer retreat through Rumania, he had been brought as a slave as far as Warsaw, where the August uprising freed him. He fought two months as a volunteer until General Bor surrendered. Then this Transylvanian swam the Vistula to the Red Army, where they investigated him and turned him loose.

Penniless, in the clothes he swam in, he had only a single thought — to get back to that five-year-old son. When I told him I had no possible way of communi-

cating with a Transylvania village he repeated reproachfully: "But I've left a five-year-old son there," as if intensity of desire must somehow change these devilish conditions. When he left me, it was clear that he intended to walk all the way home. I only feared that his insatiable homing instinct, like that of a migrant bird, might dash him into a border guard's stray bullet somewhere in the Carpathians.

The fourth applicant that morning was – believe it or not – an American!

Anthony Paskiewicz, a fit-looking fellow in Polish uniform, claimed that he was born in 1919 in New York City. War overtook him in 1939 in Poland and he had been unable to get out. In 1940 he reached the American legation in Kaunas and turned in his passport for renewal but the legation moved to Moscow and then Hitler attacked the USSR. Anthony, lacking documents of citizenship, had been drafted into the new Polish army.

"I don't mind being in the Polish army. I don't mind taking a crack at Hitler from the east instead of the west. I'm only afraid I'll lose my citizenship by fighting in a foreign army. All my folks are in New York. When will there be an American representative in Poland to tend to folks like me?"

Problems of different groups were added to these individual problems. A couple of million Poles were to be transferred from the area that had been Eastern Poland and that had become Western Ukraine and White Russia. Their delegates came to investigate the

places to which they might move. Representatives of other groups came across the lines from German-held areas, so that the coming liberation might find the Committee cognizant of their needs.

Three determined Mazurs presented their claim to East Prussia which they had colonized "seven hundred years ago before the Teutonic Knights." Though I met them in Borecza's newspaper office, the delegation was very hush-hush. "We three are alive only because we have lived for five years under false names." They assured me that Mazurs formed one third of the population of East Prussia, that they were a Slav tribe formerly speaking Polish but forcibly Germanized in recent generations. They didn't want to be Germans any more.

"German statistics call all Mazurs German," they added, "but Nazi politics treats them as an inferior race. Even Germanized Mazurs can't get good government posts under the Nazis." These Mazurs hoped that their turn to rule East Prussia had come.

Such were the conflicting problems coming to Lublin. Such was the chaos in which the Committee proclaimed the organization of something called "democracy." In every meeting, by every speaker, the words "a strong, independent, democratic Poland" were shouted like a battle cry. What was the meaning of this democracy?

In Poland, as elsewhere, democracy meant different things to different people. To my good friend

Okecki, it was the blazing light of a glorious future. To cynics — these also were plentiful in Lublin — "Democracy" was just the Committee's new political slogan, and the speakers who voiced it were "just puppets and a bunch of rubber stamps." Their open sneers left at least no doubt of one thing. This democracy, whether or not it existed or ever could exist, was being very freely discussed. Nowhere have I ever heard democracy so continuously analyzed.

A woman whose estate was confiscated in the land reform wrote angrily to the government newspaper: "How can you call it democracy when you take my home away?" Editor Borecza, showing me the letter, laughed at what seemed to him its ultimate absurdity. To him the division of large estates was the *sine qua non* of democracy, its ultimate guarantee.

In the headquarters of the four political parties — I visited them on purpose — democracy had four different shadings.

In the chilly, crowded office rooms of the Peasants' Party — *Stronnictwo Ludowe* — an affable, easygoing secretary claimed to represent the "great peasant majority" of Poland. His account of the creditable history of his party was constantly interrupted by friendly additions and contradictions from members who came and went. He admitted that the PPR — Polish Workers' Party — was gaining considerable membership among the younger peasants and especially among the farm hands who got land from the estates. This was to him just "normal, democratic

rivalry"; the old Peasants' Party still "represented the peasants." Democracy here was as friendly, as informal, and as inconclusive as a rural discussion around the stove in the corner store. Except that there wasn't any stove.

Leaving him, I took the wrong door and found myself in a large room carpeted with piles of straw. "Peasant visitors who get to talking after curfew often sleep here," he explained with a blush.

The small but influential group of intellectuals who called themselves the "Democratic Party" had a very precise taste in democracy. They knew what they wanted — the well-known Western brand. The democracy that succeeded in Great Britain, in America, and that did not quite succeed in France. This group, more than any other, was deeply disturbed by absence of British and American recognition for the new regime in Poland and the consequent lack of these countries' embassies and influence. They didn't exactly object to being rescued by the Red Army — they gave it dutiful toasts and cheers — but they wished very obviously for more representatives of Western democracy scattered around Poland to balance all those Reds!

To the earnest young women at Polish Socialist Party headquarters — called PPS for short — democracy meant the first Christmas party they'd had for their children for five years. "The Nazis wouldn't even let kindergarten babies come together in public. We are so proud of the comradely way they got on

with each other at this first party, and of the good socialist home training it shows."

To the upper PPS functionary in the adjoining office, democracy had a sterner flavor. It meant competition with the Polish Workers' Party — the PPR — not only for members but for good headquarters buildings in ruined towns. He was a bit miffed by the way "those inconsistent Communists curried favor with the masses" by cheering the Soviet Union as an ally without demanding sovietization for Poland, but only a lot of popular reforms. He himself expressed covert suspicion of the Soviet Union, which he was willing to accept as an ally, but at arm's length. He hoped that the Red Army, now that it had saved the country, would soon move on to Berlin and be out of the way of the Poles; then the PPS would promote not only a democratic Poland but a Socialist Poland.

"I wouldn't even object to a Soviet Poland," said one PPS official, to show to what lengths he would go, "as long as it wasn't part of the USSR. We're Western; we want no part in that huge, cold Siberia where for more than a hundred and fifty years our exiled Poles have died." To him the USSR had still to answer for the deeds of the Russian tsars. He would take a Soviet Socialist, but purely Polish Poland, separate, aloof, and alone.

The PPR believed in a fighting democracy. Its big gaunt building, set in a court, was guarded by soldiers with tommy guns. Additional tommy-gunned

sentries stopped me on every landing to inspect my documents. The reason for their annoying suspicion of me came out in my discussion with Secretary Weslaw, a mild-mannered man in a large, well-heated office.

"We are the motor in the land reform," he told me. "One hundred and fifty of our members have been assassinated from ambush while organizing peasant committees." Democracy to the PPR was a costly thing.

Weslaw told me that the former Polish Communist Party was dissolved by the Communist International before the war, leaving scattered Communists but no general organization. Various groups combined in January 1942 into the Polish Workers' Party "on a Marxist basis." "We were born under the terror of the occupation; we organized the first armed struggle with the invaders. Our peasant program is for a democratic Poland and not for a Soviet Poland," he affirmed. When I asked whether the future national elections would follow the Western style of competition between candidates, or the Soviet style of the single slate, Weslaw replied with a touch of irritation that the question was premature. "I can tell you this much. We will certainly fight against having any reactionaries, whether open or hidden ones, on the election lists." He looked at me firmly, defying me to introduce a reactionary.

The PPR had no inhibitions in its cheers for the Soviet Union, "our great ally," and for the Red

Army "that freed our country." It waved them as a banner to rally the Polish people's support. Its gains were rapid among young, energetic fighters, in whom the years of joint battle against Hitler had liquidated the age-long hate of Russia. These new adherents, formed perhaps nine tenths of the members around a smaller core of experienced Communists.

For the ordinary Polish citizen the meaning of democracy was that Nazi race slavery is over, that a "man's a man for a' that," and that every citizen must pitch in. It meant energetic peasants organizing committees, coming to congresses in Lublin, going home to divide the land. It meant workers in factories organizing trade-unions, sending delegates to city councils. It meant all kinds of people shouting and organizing for new ideas.

Even the Polish Army called itself democratic, though its officers still commanded and its soldiers still obeyed. A democratic army meant that peasants' and workers' sons could rise to be officers; that the army was expected to defend the citizenry and not to boss it. The prewar Polish Army and especially its officers had formed a superior caste.

Nobody in Poland thought of democracy as confined to voting, but everyone believed in voting, "whenever there was time." I made a point of questioning a cross section of the delegates at a provincial peasants' congress to determine how many had been elected and on what basis. They came from widely scattered areas, and clearly felt that they "represented"

these areas, but they were less concerned with the technique of representation than with getting on with a job. They were peasants expressing themselves in action rather than in analysis.

The first ten I approached had been appointed by local mayors or county bodies; "hand-picked," I was ready to say. But just as I prepared to apply this cynical designation to the entire congress the next ten delegates happened to have been elected at village meetings especially called. Further inquiry revealed that everybody believed in elections, but that there were so many congresses and so many things to send delegates to that "you couldn't hold elections every time." Knowing as I did the complicated tasks confronting the hitherto disorganized rural areas in the heat of land reform, the excuse seemed honest enough.

Right in this peasant congress I received a shock to the whole concept of democracy. A delegate whose clothes and shrewd face were not those of a peasant, and who had been watching my inquiries with amusement, told me that he was an "agronom," sent by the county government because of his technical knowledge. He added: "Democracy from above!"

Taken aback, I asked whether he implied a criticism or whether he meant that there was really a democracy from above. Still with amused detachment he replied that there were "so many kinds of democracy. . . . There is Western democracy, that most older peasants think they favor; and Soviet democracy, that some of the farm hands want. . . . I think what we

1101237

are getting in Poland is a second-and-a-half democracy." The allusion to the "second-and-a-half international" was unmistakable; this man was a sophisticate in the revolutionary struggles of the past twenty years. Yet there was about him something subtly discomforting, as if he jeered at us all. So I asked him straight out what kind of democracy he wanted.

"Me? I'm not for any kind of democracy," he tossed out. "I'm for the dictatorship of the proletariat!"

He thoroughly enjoyed surprising me, so he went on: "I used to be a Communist! But I didn't join this new PPR; it's too milk-and-water for me. Why don't they take us as equals into the Soviet Union instead of keeping us like a Mongolian People's Republic, unripe to be sovietized?"

On the last words his sneer grew deadly. He made the world taste bitter. He was an expert poisoner of anybody's democracy or any faith between nations. What was he doing in this congress of simple people, so hastily organizing their country? Was he poisoning for Hitler, for the London Poles, or merely for pride in his own sophistication? It was hard to tell.

The National Committee of Liberation was organizing a country not only out of the chaos left by the Nazis but out of the ideas of honestly differing people and in the face of all the enemy sneers. It had for its aid, not only the political parties, the administrative "resorts," the congresses of delegates from every kind of organization, but many other institu-

tions, of which I shall here mention only a few.

Eighty men and women from eighteen years to forty were gathered in a "propaganda school" in a large gymnasium. All were in winter overcoats, for it was December and the chill of the unheated room smote to the bones. Some sat on long benches at heavy tables; others stood for lack of seats. Most of them had neither paper nor pencils, for there was a shortage of these. All listened very intently as different lecturers discussed the hopes of the new Poland, its methods of organizing, its differences with the London Poles. I heard a lecture here by Dr. Jendrychowski, Polish Ambassador to Moscow and the newly appointed Ambassador to Paris; he was followed by Dr. Hilary Minc, chief of the reconstruction of Polish industry. Nobody was too important or too learned to bring his knowledge to these eighty men and women from the factories and the farms.

The students applauded loudly when they learned that I was from America. Applause died when I told them that I was only a private person, for they were ready to take a new American ambassador in their day's work. The incident served as introduction to their dormitory that evening. Clustered on iron cots — they were set so close that there was no space in the room for any other furniture — these students told of past sufferings and future hopes.

"The Nazis burned our village twice," said a buxom red-cheeked girl in a fuzzy white shawl and white sweater. "They burned the house next door with the

man, his wife, and two small children; I heard the shrieks. A year later when we had built the village up again they burned it all over. Some of us got away to the woods."

Stanislaw Orlowski, a stalwart man in his thirties, had managed to cross the battle front to Lublin after the Germans burned his home and lined his fellow villagers up for deportation. A young man from Kuchawa village had seen how "many, many died" under the artillery fire of the advancing Red Army, when the Germans forced Polish civilians to replace German soldiers in building fortifications. Josefa Boberska, of Warsaw, told how the adolescent boys of the "Holy Spirit Asylum" were hung in a row from the balcony over the street. "That was when the Nazis shot Father Siemiec and stole the gold vessels."

Wanda Piech, whose red-flowered kerchief covered a childlike face under a crown of gold braids, had been caught as a partisan fighter and put in Maidanek death camp. "But the Red Army was near and its bombs fell all around and in the confusion one of our men cut the barbed-wire fence and eight of us got away."

A young mechanic from the factory town, Minsk-Masowetski, told how the Germans destroyed the power plant and the iron and steel works "by which all Minsk lived." The people met the Red Army with flowers and fruit, and held a mass meeting and set up a municipal government and got machines, "some from Lublin and some from the USSR and some we

made by hand ourselves. Already we are turning out farm implements. But we are still in the front lines and German artillery still shells us. This killed several workers last week."

Rapidly growing trade-unions were another important factor in organizing the country. Three of their leaders came to my room on invitation to tell about their work. Casimir Witaszewski, a lean man in the late thirties with a pleasantly professorial manner, had been secretary of the Lodz Textile Workers before the war; he was now general secretary of the central trade-union body of liberated Poland. With him came Marian Czerwinski and Wladislaw Kuszyk, secretary and chairman of the Lublin Provincial Council of Trade-Unions. As partisan fighters they had come into Lublin during the last days of German occupation and secretly organized factory workers to save the machinery and equipment. In the chaotic hours when the Germans were fleeing from the city, these two men were calling factory meetings, electing shop committees, and setting up guards over the factory property.

"There was no municipal government yet in Lublin," they told me, "so the workers not only guarded their own factories but elected 'candidates' to a municipal government. We called them 'candidates' because we didn't know how many would be taken or on what basis. We set up our temporary municipal government of twenty-four members ten days before the Committee of National Liberation came to Lublin.

We kept adding members from political parties, from doctors, teachers, merchants. Now we have a Lublin City Council of fifty members of whom fourteen are chosen by the trade-unions. This will be our city government until the general elections after the war."

Industrial workers everywhere in Poland, said Witaszewski, played an important part in liberating their country. They had reason to, for under the Germans industrial workers were slaves. "The bosses sometimes even beat them with sticks. They could not escape by leaving the factory for if caught anywhere without working papers from a German factory owner they would be deported to factories in Germany. Maidanek hung like a final threat over anyone unable or unwilling to work; he could be declared 'useless' and dragged away to death. When the Red Army approached, the Germans tried to destroy not only the factories but the Polish working class. In Praga, the great industrial suburb of Warsaw, they deported the skilled workers until there were practically none left. Elsewhere they killed many workers.

"Wherever the workers survived they organized to preserve precious bits of the industry on which their livelihood depended. The power plant functions today in Zamosc because its workers stole important equipment and hid it so that the Germans could not take it away. The workers in the Stalewawola Steel and Munitions Works dropped all the finest precision machinery into barrels of fine oil and buried it under-

ground, both saving it from the Germans and protecting it against rust."

All this tied up with a visit to a small tannery and shoe factory I had made a few days earlier. The girls there told of the beatings received under the Germans. On the last day of German occupation the workers were taken to Maidanek and forced to dig a deep grave. "We wept all day because the Red Army was coming and we would not live to see it. But the Red Army came faster than the Germans expected and suddenly our guards all ran away. We couldn't believe that we were still to live."

The same girls told how the sewing machines all disappeared from the shoe factory at the time when the residents of the district were helping themselves to all the manufactured shoes. "We thought the machines were stolen and maybe they were. But as soon as we formed our trade-union, the sewing machines turned up in the homes of the workers, who brought them back at the union's call. They just wanted to be sure they had their machines safe, either at home or in the factory."

More than a hundred thousand workers had already joined trade-unions, according to Witaszewski. This was a creditable showing for the eastern part of Poland, which has few large centers of industry. "The workers are very much pleased," he explained, "because we are organizing only one union in an industry. In prewar Poland the workers were divided into

unions split on political lines: Socialist unions, Catholic unions, Nationalist unions, even Nazi so-called unions. Everybody knew that this was a dissipation of the workers' strength. The Germans abolished all Polish trade-unions, of whatever label. Now we organize anew on an industrial union base."

As I went to dinner after my talk with Witaszewski I was wondering how this National Committee of Liberation managed to finance all its network of congresses, trade-unions, propaganda schools, and government "resorts." Then just as I entered the dining room I got the answer, in a sudden blinding flash. Somebody remarked: "It was tough last August, but when the peasants began delivering food in September, we all began to eat." And I saw that the complex organization of power in Poland was at bottom as simple as that.

The only real values left in Poland when the Germans retreated in midsummer of 1944 were the buildings still standing in some of the towns and villages and the harvest, unripe and ungathered in the fields. Everything else was broken, currency was useless, people were hungry, ragged, and often shelterless.

What enabled the Committee to expand so freely was not money, or foreign recognition, but control of certain housing facilities in Lublin and certain stores of food. When the Committee got some apartment houses and offices, it had an organizing base. When it induced the peasants to turn in food quotas for feeding the cities, its base was stabilized. Shelter

and food protected by a Polish army on the Vistula — these were its sources of power.

After this peasants and workers could come to congresses and schools in Lublin. They could come penniless, hitchhiking over a ruined country, ragged, barefoot, without paper or pencils, but they would be housed and fed. Brilliant engineers and famous scientists could offer their services and the Committee could keep expanding to take them in. Always provided — it was a big proviso — they were patriots willing to work for their shelter and three meals in a government dining room.

As long as the Committee could arouse and organize that type of loyalty and as long as the peasants would provide food, the Committee could carry on. Anyone who stayed outside the Committee's sphere, whether through opposition, inadvertence, or lack of organization, could simply keep on living on his savings, his hide, or the black market until the Committee expanded to take him in.

The fate of my fellow traveler Okecki was a case in point. I worried somewhat for the future of this charming old man, who knew everything about roads and nothing about managing his personal life. The Committee gave him a bed and meals in our dining room and he knocked about Lublin trying to find out who sent for him and for what job. He never learned. He began to radiate a desperate, determined optimism; about the tenth day he turned up sincerely beaming. He had found people who knew his capac-

ities, he had been made vice-commissioner of roads and waterways for Poland. He was still sharing an unheated hotel room with five other people as he plunged enthusiastically into work.

"Our younger engineers," he told me, "have been a bit standoffish towards the Committee but I find that I have some reputation among them. More and more of them are co-operating and seeing things our way." Four months later — but that is another story — I learned that Okecki was governor of the united port of Danzig and Gdynia, building Poland's new outlet to the sea. Somewhere along this triumphal progress — if you care about Okecki's personal comfort — he acquired a three-room flat.

Thus the Committee built its base in Lublin and from Lublin spread across the land. More and more, in the weeks that I watched it, I wondered which of the Poles in London could fit into the kind of building that was here.

CHAPTER III

Table Companions in Lublin

FOOD, not money, was the basis of life in Poland. Six free dining rooms for upper civil servants were the cornerstones of the state. Similar dining rooms for municipal employees and factory workers ensured that these necessary groups should survive. The wages and salaries paid in paper *zlote* counted for little. Permits to eat three times a day in some dining room were much more valuable than any amount of printed cash.

The dining room to which I was assigned as guest correspondent was one of the best. Our diet was solidly based on substantial amounts of dark rye bread and potatoes — Poland's two staples — garnished with small amounts of meat, cereals, and root vegetables. For luxury we had sugar in our tea, a limited quantity of butter on our bread and an occasional dessert of cooked apples. A little milk was reserved for those whose health demanded it; the pleasant elderly woman who ran the dining room was so thrilled by the presence of an American that she regularly offered some to me.

As long as these meals sufficed me I had no need for a cent. The first Polish money I spent was for a newspaper in my second Lublin week. But when potatoes and rye bread palled and I sent the housemaid to market for some butter and honey, I found that either of these cost the legal equivalent of some fifteen dollars a pound. I also found that I could sell a new but ordinary pair of silk stockings – prewar $1.25 in America – for eighteen hundred paper *zlote,* legally one hundred and fifty dollars, equal to ten pounds of butter or honey. I then understood how all persons in Poland with any reserve of clothes or usable commodities had lived for the previous five years.

"We all went in for speculation," said Dr. Waclaw Rabe, a pleasant, portly man, one of my table companions. "We studied the fluctuating value of bread and potatoes in terms of shirts and shoes. Now that these dining rooms are established, we can concentrate on our professional work." He was president of the new State University.

Around the table I became informally acquainted with many Lublin leaders. People came at irregular hours, snatching the day's main meal any time between twelve and four. There were no reserved places; the dining room could not have accommodated half its clients at a single sitting. We ate at two long tables – boards raised on trestles – wherever we chanced to find room. This brought me automatically into contact with a changing succession of people, all of whom met me without formal introduction, talking eagerly

about their work. This was the expansive period, typical of any new regime that feels itself revolutionary and wants to explain itself to the world.

One of the older men was Casimir Czechowski, chief of the "justice resort." His appearance, that of a typical, staid, middle-aged government official, gave little hint of his highly revolutionary past. He was one of the founders of the Peasant Party, having organized in 1915 under the German occupation of the first World War a local group in Piotrkow which later merged with others into a nation-wide organization. When the Kaiser's army collapsed the young Casimir helped organize the new Polish state.

"Rogalski and I made that first government in Lublin in 1918," he told me, "the first independent Polish government there had been for a hundred years."

That was in the pride of his youth. His memory of it was darkened by regret. "We didn't put the land reform through then, so all was lost. The landlords' dictatorship came to power. That is why I now disagree with Mikolajczyk – he is also of my party – who wants to postpone the land reform again."

Unlike many aging progressives, Czechowski had not lost his early fire. At the risk of his life he went as a delegate to the first illegal Rada, held secretly in Warsaw on New Year's Eve of 1944. Four months later he flew with General Zymierski to Moscow on that adventurous trip when the first airplane crashed and the Germans hunted five days through the woods for those who had failed to take off. It was hard to

imagine this quiet, stoop-shouldered man in dark glasses hiding five days in the woods.

Through him I met Henry Ciesluk, prosecuting attorney in the special tribunal for war criminals. He beamed in greeting me and told me that he had five brothers in Detroit working for Ford. He was full of hair-raising tales of Gestapo spies and of people who helped torture or murder prisoners. "They all claim that the Gestapo threatened them with death or jail, but this is no excuse for treason to one's country."

Trials of such criminals were proceeding in three different cities of the liberated area; they were considered a safety valve lest an outraged populace take punishment into its own hands. The judges were nominated by the "justice resort" from lawyers of at least two years' practice; their appointment was confirmed by the presidium of the Rada. Each judge had two citizen assistants, chosen from teachers, trade-unionists, and other responsible persons to fill a function similar to that of a jury.

"The first jury trials ever held in Lublin," gloried Ciesluk, explaining that tsarist Russia, to which Lublin once belonged, had no juries and that under the Polish republic Lublin was not a judicial center.

One man brought to trial, a former soldier of the Polish Army named Misselski, had been in charge of the center at No. 6 Krokhmalnaia Street, where Poles from the rural district were collected to be sent to Germany as slaves. There was testimony that Misselski raped girls there and kept them for several weeks

for himself before sending them through to Germany. It was also proved that he withheld from the prisoners the food sent to them by a committee of Lublin workers. No young man dared bring this food lest he also be seized. Old women carried it; Misselski beat them, kicked them out, and threw the food on the ground. During the trial Misselski was recognized by six people in the courtroom who came to the stand to add their testimony.

"He's been executed. I myself attended," finished Ciesluk.

Helene Daczko, another of his cases, would have been unbelievable in the most bloodcurdling horror story. She took the stand, with dark chestnut hair freshly waved, challenging the court with her sex. It was shown that as a Gestapo agent she had betrayed her stepmother and half brother to death, reporting that they took food to the partisans in the woods. Helene's own father asked for the death sentence on her.

She fought hard for life. When condemned she petitioned President Bierut for clemency. When he refused, she appealed, claiming pregnancy. "This gives her a respite while a doctors' commission examines," said Ciesluk. "If her claim is true the execution must wait. The Germans never delayed for such things."

The prize picture in Ciesluk's rogues' gallery was a woman spy named Misterskaia, who betrayed many near neighbors. "She was bold as brass throughout. When she reached the gallows she removed her front

gold bridge and asked us to give it to her sister. As her last wish she wanted her sister to have all the things that she hid. When asked what things, she said: 'The things the Gestapo let me keep when I turned in Jews.' She began to list these things saying: 'Wait, wait, I remember his name now and the place where I hid them. Six jeweled rings are there.' She was playing for time before death but she actually believed she could will these things to her sister!"

Two of my table companions were experts on the fate of the Jews under the Nazis. Dr. Emil Sommerstein, with his white hair, white beard, and benevolent air, was chairman of Jewish aid, while dynamic Dr. Szlema Herschenhorn, who had been a member of the Lublin City Council before the war, was special adviser on the Jewish situation. They told me that of three and a half million Jews in prewar Poland there were less than one hundred thousand left.

They went into details. "In Lublin itself there were once forty-two thousand Jews; we found only fifty when we liberated the city. In the entire liberated area we have so far listed only eight thousand Jews, but probably two or three times that number have not yet made themselves known. At the outside there may be a quarter of a million Polish Jews scattered in various places of the USSR. It is clear that more than three million were killed. Besides these, large numbers of Jews were brought from all parts of Nazi-occupied Europe to death camps in Poland.

"Poland was made a vast cemetery for European

Jewry. Together with our people every vestige of our culture, our press, our schools, was destroyed. Even our graveyards were obliterated. In the old Jewish cemetery in Lublin the century-old gravestones were torn up for sidewalks and foundations. In the new Lublin cemetery there was left one broken vault jammed with bricks — the grave of Rabbi Meyer. He was the last Rabbi in Lublin."

Henry Altman, in charge of labor problems and social care, was a living example of this tragedy. I saw his slight, unobtrusive figure slipping in and out of the dining room many times before it occurred to me to ask him about his work; then the deep lines of suffering in the peaked face under the thin, dark hair attracted my attention. I learned that he had been a member of the General Council of Trade-Unions before the war.

"I'm the only council member left in Poland now; the others either fled to London or were killed." When I asked whether I might use his name in news cables — many of my table companions objected lest it endanger relatives still in the hands of the Germans — I received a shock. Altman said quietly: "There's no objection. All my family and relatives have already been killed." Without further comment he continued the discussion of proposed new labor laws.

Edward Bertold, chief organizer of the land reform, was irregular in the dining room, since he took many trips to the rural districts. When I saw him he was

usually absorbed in discussions; it was from others that I learned that he was a peasant's son who became a rural schoolteacher, later graduating from the law faculty in Warsaw in 1934. I saw him several times in public meetings where he was a compelling speaker. If I nabbed him in passing he would hand me a few statistics in a brisk, decisive manner, but they seldom dovetailed. This was not surprising, for Poland's boundaries have changed frequently, while farm boundaries have been affected by several agricultural crises; not even the number of peasants could be given with finality until it was known how many would be repatriated from the eastern areas and how many would survive to return from German slavery.

The land reform, said Bertold, aimed to give every peasant family at least twelve acres. "We consider that a farming family with rational use of land backed by state credits and co-operative purchase of machinery and seeds can live well on twelve acres. In Holland they average from five to seven acres but the soil is very intensively cultivated. In Czechoslovakia they have eighteen to twenty acres; in Denmark ten to fifteen. We can reach the Denmark standard only through the addition of East Prussia and other lands to the west."

Father Borowiec, a picturesque figure in black clerical robes, was conspicuous in our dining room whenever he came to town. He was president of the Rzeczow District Rada — governor of a small-sized state. In prewar Poland he had been locally prominent in

the Peasants' Party. During the years of occupation he had kept in touch with the Polish underground. Now during the land reform he traveled from village to village "counseling with the peasants to see that they divide justly." He was the father of his district in more than a religious sense.

One noon I ran into handsome George Strachelski, *voyevod* of the Bialystok district where the industry had been almost completely destroyed by the Germans. "Three fourths of the factories have to be rebuilt from scratch; the others can be eventually repaired." He had organized the industrial workers to hunt for machines and spare parts in the ruins and was finding some usable machines even in the rubble. In land reform his district was the first to complete the division. "Our land was easily divided, for the Germans had seized it all, forming large German estates of about a thousand acres each; these owners fled as the Red Army came in. There wasn't enough to give every peasant family twelve acres so they are moving into the Suwalki district just north of us where many farms were abandoned by German colonists."

The vice-chief of health, Dr. George Morzycki, was a worried-looking man. He nodded towards the dozens of civil servants hurrying through their meal. "Those folks are full of optimism but I tell you I'm afraid of epidemics," he declared grimly. As head of the antityphus fight in the great epidemic during the occupation he knew what there was to fear. He

had seen things that the world had never been allowed to know.

"Poland has lost too many people already. Land reform and progressive laws are all very well, but first of all the Poles have to be kept alive. Of thirty-three million people at least eight million died in the death camps and from epidemics. Do you wonder that I'm worried? I visited counties of a hundred thousand population where thirty thousand were sick with typhus. In some villages the entire population died. I'll never forget one peasant's cottage where I found the man and woman dead and a dying baby just born from the woman in her last agonies.

"The Germans caused it. They shipped several million Poles from the west into the General Government, giving them neither housing space, change of clothing, soap nor medical supplies. Epidemics spread from this filth and poverty and from the hunger and overcrowding in the ghettos. After 1941 they spread from big camps of Russian war prisoners dying of hunger. I saw such a camp in the Carpathians where of eighty thousand prisoners, sixty thousand died in one month. When the typhus reached its height — three or four hundred thousand cases — the Germans feared for their army. So they let us fight it even among the Polish population but they allowed us no vaccine for our medical personnel. This was one of their methods for killing off Polish doctors. We had twelve thousand doctors before the war and now there are only four or five thousand."

Dr. Morzycki found a way to cheat the Germans. The laboratories of the Warsaw Institute of Hygiene, where he had worked for ten years, were taken over by the Germans but continued to employ the Polish personnel. The Poles organized an underground university and laboratories; Dr. Morzycki was professor of bacteriology. "We made vaccines secretly in the cellar to inoculate all our sanitary personnel fighting typhus; the Germans would have killed us if they had known. Later I became a doctor among the partisans of the People's Army. We doctors have modern knowledge but our conditions today are those of the Middle Ages. Babies are dying of diphtheria while all Poland has only one hundred fifty ampules of antitoxin."

The chief of the "school resort," a rangy, carelessly dressed midwestern type, was an educational enthusiast. "If I had another life I'd be a teacher again," he told me. When he knew that I wanted to hear about the schools he invited me to his office after supper; he would have time for an unhurried interview then, since the curfew kept casual visitors away. He gave me the password, bending over and whispering "*Bomba.*" Curfew passwords were usually easy to remember, because they had to be understood by both Russians and Poles.

Dr. Stanislaw Skrzeszewski found it harder to teach me the pronunciation of his name; we tried it that evening in his office with considerable mirth. Despite his two degrees from Cracow University and the Sor-

bonne in Paris, his progressive views and activity in the Teachers' Union kept him from a steady position in prewar Poland. He taught for years in a teachers' training school but was never regularly on the staff. "I had only one happy summer vacation when I knew in advance I would teach next autumn." Fleeing east from Cracow when the Germans struck in 1939, the doctor prepared Polish textbooks for the grammar grades in Lvov. Later, under the Union of Polish Patriots, he organized schools for Polish children throughout the USSR. Now he was starting schools in liberated Poland.

"Schools under the occupation were few and of poor quality," he stated. "Primary schools had only six grades with an average of eighty children per teacher. There were no general secondary schools and no universities. Illegal teaching went on widely; even adolescent boys became enthusiasts for learning in illegal schools." The doctor smiled at "the boys" and then added: "These schools were disorganized by Gestapo raids. Children learned to evade the Gestapo; when caught with school books they said they were taking them to market to sell for food. Those years left our children mature beyond their years, but lacking in formal education.

"We start schools the moment an area is liberated. Our teachers have done a heroic job; they've organized parents and children to repair buildings, make furniture, and hunt books. Often the classes have to be

held in the teacher's own room; everywhere there is a shortage of desks, of textbooks, of paper and pencils and, worst of all, of shoes and warm clothing. Many children have to stay at home in bad weather and I've even seen teachers coming barefoot in districts near the front. Schools are also affected by the battle line. In Praga many were closed for several weeks in September when the main streets were under direct enemy fire. Our teachers show considerable ingenuity; by holding smaller classes in their own rooms so that children need not cross dangerous streets they were able to open some schools even when Praga was still in the front lines.

"In spite of these difficulties we have nearly a million children in school this autumn in a total population of some seven million people." One felt his confidence.

The office door was suddenly pushed open by a tall, lanky man with rumpled sandy hair and tie askew. It was Janusz, *de facto* vice-president of Poland. He approached the doctor with the manner of an embarrassed schoolboy. Then a stream of words burst forth, after which both men smiled and shook hands energetically. Janusz left with a triumphant look. "What's up?" I asked.

"I'm organizing a little excursion to Moscow for fifty of our leading lights to get acquainted with Soviet culture. Janusz is going; he wants to take his son. I have agreed since we have several vacancies. Some

of those invited turned us down on the ground that there was no culture in Russia to see." The doctor grimaced.

It remained for my friend Dr. Rabe to tell me about the new universities. A former zoology professor in Lvov, now organizing the new Curie University in Lublin, he came to my room after lunch. He brought with him Dr. Edward Grzegorzewski, a graduate of Johns Hopkins, who was organizing the college of medicine. Other professors for the new university had come from Vilno or Lvov or across the German lines from Warsaw and Poznań.

Lublin had never had a university. There had been a small Catholic college in the city which, like all institutions of higher learning in Poland, had been closed by the Germans. This had reopened with the aid of the Committee soon after the Red Army freed the city. Its faculties were, however, limited to divinity, law, and the humanities. The Committee therefore decided to open a state university with the scientific faculties: agriculture, medicine, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine. They put a former high-school building with sixty rooms at Dr. Rabe's disposal and gave him several rooms in a hospital for a clinic; this was all the Committee could give except its blessing and plenty of students. Six hundred immediately applied.

"They are all graduates of prewar secondary schools or of underground courses held during the war. We cannot possibly take them all without much more

equipment. We are also organizing advanced work for more than a hundred students sent to us from the Polish Army – young folks who, on the basis of two or three years' medical training, have been doing emergency surgery. We must help them qualify fully.

"But how can we run a university without books? Without microscopes? Without charts and laboratory equipment? Americans wonder why Poland's first request to the American Red Cross and the UNRRA was for university equipment flown in by plane. We didn't get it; they said we needed food and clothes first instead of all those frills. Can't they realize" – it was the only time Dr. Rabe spoke with passion – "that the mental and spiritual life of Poland is at stake? The Nazis have murdered our physicians and scientists. Unless we can at once make use of those we have left and multiply their brains in the next generation, the Nazi aim of destroying Polish culture will succeed."

"What do you get with the building beside bare walls?" I asked.

"Plenty of fresh air," answered Dr. Grzegorzewski, with a wry smile. "Lots of broken windows, and Poland has as yet no factory for making window glass. We have repaired or boarded over the windows; we have made desks, tables, benches. Local physicians have donated microscopes and thermostats; but we need two hundred microscopes and in all Lublin we found only half a dozen. The Nazis took the rest."

"Worst of all is the lack of books and modern sci-

entific periodicals," supplemented Dr. Rabe. "Our professors must teach many things from memory. This isn't so bad in literature and the humanities, but imagine trying to remember scientific formulae and technical medical details. Especially when your memory is broken by five years during which Polish intellectuals lived the lives of hunted beasts."

The younger doctor showed me a letter received from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1941. In the customary formal words it stated that the funds granted to Dr. Grzegorzewski in 1939 for scientific travel in Europe had lapsed, because "due to unfortunate conditions" he had been unable to make the trip. It was a masterpiece of understatement; the "conditions" were the most frightful war in history.

"If we had a little of that money now," said Dr. Rabe as they rose to go.

One of my most amiable table companions was Jan Karol Wende, a young Polish writer who was assistant chief of the "culture resort." He lived in my apartment house directly below me; I went to his room when I needed to use the telephone. He told me whimsically that he was trying to develop a reading public "if only so that we writers may live." More seriously he added that even the best Polish writers could not make a living before the war by writing; they worked at other jobs and wrote in their spare time.

"Our educated class was small. The Polish people didn't buy books. The upper class bought them, but

only as wall decorations. Just now a lot of landlords' villas come to us in the land reform. Their owners are allowed to take things out of them. They take quantities of furniture but they always leave the books. I collect these books and make public libraries with them. To us whose libraries were destroyed by the Germans — in the Warsaw public library alone two million volumes were lost — these books are life!"

He began to roll a cigarette from newspaper. Holding it up, he remarked: "My salary as vice-commissioner is fifteen hundred *zlote* a month — five dollars on the market. It almost keeps me in cigarettes! Towards the end of the month I roll my own. Can you imagine those London guys rolling their own from newspaper?" Both of us laughed.

One day after we were well acquainted Jan took from his pocket a newspaper clipping that had been folded and carried until the fold was almost worn through. It contained a poem with his signature. "I wrote this in 1938 and it was given to me five years later by a Polish Jewish lawyer in Central Asia. It is one of the most precious things I own."

I waited for the story. He saw that I really wanted it so he went on: "I had been in Anders's army but when he went to Iran I wouldn't leave the USSR."

"Were you free to stay behind?"

"Oh, and how! They could sell my place to plenty of Poles who had no army connections and therefore no claim to be cared for. There was quite a traffic in vacant places of soldiers and officers who didn't

go. Well, after Anders left I looked around in Central Asia and organized a secondary school for the Poles there. This made my presence known. This Jewish lawyer sought me out and handed me the clipping, asking whether I remembered when I wrote it.

"Certainly I remembered. There was a congress on child care in Warsaw that year. Polish fascist gangs chose that moment to beat up Jewish children; they threw little babies out of baby carriages and knocked school kids senseless. So I wrote this poem in a little democratic weekly saying that child care must begin by caring for all children regardless of race.

"The Jewish lawyer said: 'I cut out your poem. And when my little daughter asked me — she was seven years old — Papa, why are they beating up Jewish children? I told her that only bad Poles did it and that there were good Poles who were against it. I read her your poem because I didn't want her to grow up hating Poles. . . . But after all she never grew up. I left her with her mother in Warsaw when they ordered the men to leave the city in 1939. I never got back. Both of them were killed long ago. This clipping is the only thing I have left from my little daughter. It's like having her photograph.' "

In the long silence that followed I looked at Wende and then at the clipping. "You took it away from him," I said reproachfully.

"We both of us wanted it. But the father said that if I would write out the poem in my own handwriting

and sign it he would take that as a fair exchange between two Poles, a Jew and a Slav, both against race hatred. I think that is really how I came to this work in the 'culture resort.' I want to influence the thought of the next generation."

The most romantic story I heard during those Lublin weeks was that of Captain Stanislaw George Letz. A prewar popular writer of satirical poems, his adventures during the war would fill a detective "thriller." He escaped from the concentration camp in Tarnopol by "a major miracle," survived as a partisan fighter by a succession of day-by-day minor miracles, being under death sentence both of the Gestapo and of the NSZ, the Polish reactionary terrorists. In the spring of 1944, as staff officer of the People's Army in the Lublin area, he received Polish parachutists and airborne weapons dropped by the Red Army in forest clearings. He was now a captain in the regular Polish Army but his radioman had been dropped further west to a partisan group in occupied Poland.

Letz showed me a neat little card that bore his picture and official proof that he had worked three years in a Warsaw power station, each year signed with a different official signature and stamped with the municipal stamp of the General Government and with the German eagle. He smiled.

"All of it false. Our People's Army had a bureau for making them. We raided the magistrates for the

proper blanks and stamps. Sometimes we had our people even in the magistrate's office supplying us direct. This pass was only good with the ordinary military police that stopped you in the street. If they checked it at the Gestapo office, I was lost. For big money you could get a pass that checked even with the Gestapo records."

Letz was betrayed in the autumn of 1943 while editing an underground newspaper, *Soldier in Battle;* he was living of course under an assumed name. "I learned from our Intelligence that the NSZ had me on their death list under my right name. We immediately left the house where we issued our newspaper. Next day the Gestapo surrounded the house but caught nobody. This sort of thing showed up the link between the Polish fascists and the Gestapo. I was sent at once to the other side of the Vistula to put out a paper under a different name. It was called *Free Folk;* we printed it in barns from one village to another."

Letz's prize exploit was his escape at Tarnopol. He was confined in the concentration camp there for nearly two years. "A hungry, filthy place, as much of a death camp as Maidanek but without the efficient technical arrangements for mass murder. My command of German – I was born in Lvov when it was part of Austria – got me the job of orderly in the hospital. When the place got crowded from typhus, the patients were shot to make room for more. I knew I'd get typhus, working there without vaccine, so I

arranged with another orderly to hide me; we hid each other in turn when sick. Thus I escaped one of the clean-ups when the typhus cases were shot.

"From a newspaper in a German doctor's office, I learned in the summer of 1943 that the Red Army was near. We had a little underground group of six — old schoolmates who could rely on each other. We knew that the Germans would slaughter the prisoners before retreating; when they were drunk they boasted openly that we would never live to see the Red Army come. Our group made several unsuccessful attempts to get away. One of us got an SS uniform by bribery; we had a vague idea that it might come in handy.

"They chose to liquidate the camp on the night of July 22nd. They took us all to a big field and made us dig a long deep ditch for a grave. We had to kneel along the edge while SS men walked rapidly along, shooting the prisoners in the back of the head and kicking them into the ditch. Quick and efficient, one motion per murder. Suddenly a lot of us were running away, and the Germans shot at us. I don't know who started it, whether I first yelled or another. I don't know how many got away. Five of my buddies got to the camp; probably the Germans shot less in that direction, thinking they would get us later. We hid in a shack in camp for a day.

"The next night I put on the SS uniform — I wore it because of my perfect German — and drove my comrades as my prisoners out of the camp. The Germans were already demoralized. We passed one patrol after

the other. The uniform lacked the belt and the cap; if they saw my prisoner's belt and ordinary cap we were all dead men. We came without incident to the bridge over the railway in Tarnopol — our only way out, guarded by picked SS troops.

"We marched with a certain confidence because we considered that we were armed. We had stolen two rusty revolvers and a couple of hand grenades from the camp. We thought that at worst we could blow ourselves up along with the guards. Now that I know what real arms are, I shudder. We hadn't a chance!

"Then came the miracle! The guard shouted 'Halt.' We marched ahead regardless. He shouted 'Halt' again and came over to us. Then I stepped forward — I was at the rear — and he flashed the light on me. It hit my chest and reflected from my face. An inch higher or lower it would have shown the belt or the cap.

" '*Ach! Das sind Sie! Verzeihung!*' The light was turned off. I'll never forget his tone. He must have taken me for someone very important who was not accustomed to being challenged. I couldn't even answer. I ordered my prisoners, '*Jungens, vorwaerts.*' We went ahead two miles before we remembered to breathe.

"That was greater satire than anything I ever wrote. It was a miracle, and from this miracle I lived. Later I came through a lot of tight places through a certain carelessness toward death that had grown in me. Once I walked right through the German police in Warsaw

after curfew by simply saying breathlessly that it was too late to stop. Death had become meaningless; I had seen too many dead men. Death is a monotone; it is life that has terror and variety."

Letz, it was plain, had not ceased to be a poet. "I wrote satirical verses in the worst days in Tarnopol. They are lost now, for I have forgotten them and the copies are buried under the earth. My best friend had them in his breast pocket when he was shot and kicked into that ditch. He always expected to survive; he was saving my work for posterity. I myself never expected to get out alive."

Through chance, through courage, and through miracle, the Lublin leaders had survived.

CHAPTER IV

Chiefs of State

MY first personal meeting with Edward Osubka-Morawski, chairman of the Committee of National Liberation, was embarrassingly dramatic. I had come late to a congress of co-operative societies and fought my way through a couple of thousand people only to find every chair at the press table occupied. In the middle of a speech by President Bierut I was standing alone in the very front of the hall.

Morawski was not on the platform, which was reserved for the executive board of the Co-operatives. Four rather gaudy armchairs had been dug out of somebody's parlor and placed conspicuously in a small open space on the floor, directly in front of and facing the stage, so that government dignitaries might come and go in their spare moments regardless of the crowd. Three armchairs were vacant; Morawski occupied the fourth. He saw me standing and beckoned me to a seat; for half an hour the two of us occupied this unofficial government box. Nobody worried about protocol except the people at the press table who at the first intermission found a place for me.

Later Morawski addressed the gathering. It con-

sisted of practical peasants who had come to Lublin to organize co-operative business and to see what this new Committee was about. They had not yet declared themselves politically. They draped their stage neither in Moscow red nor in Polish national colors but in the rainbow flags of the international co-operative movement. The executives on the stage included several solid farmers, a gray-haired woman of the type that runs community affairs, and a man who looked like a small-town banker.

Morawski got no great ovation at the beginning. He used few orator's tricks. He hardly capitalized the fact that the battle front was only sixty miles away. His pale face under the tangle of dark brown hair seemed tired but very friendly and sincere. He outlined the Committee's policies and its differences with the government-in-exile. His speech was long, direct and explanatory rather than emotional. As he made his points the nods of assent increased in the hall.

"General Anders took our Polish officers away to the African deserts. He took them to fight for Rome. But here we had no one to fight for us until our new Polish Army came." At the mention of the army the applause was for the first time unrestrained. It broke out loudly again when, after telling of the Committee's invitation to Mikolajczyk and the latter's insistence on referring the matter to his London colleagues, the speaker said: "Questions of Poland must be decided in Poland and not in Moscow or London." Everyone in the audience clearly accepted this. They

were tillers of Polish soil, made uneasy by all these dispositions of fate in foreign capitals.

Morawski adores congresses. The first thing he said to me later in his office was: "Don't stick around Lublin leaders. Go to peasant congresses, to trade-union congresses. See and hear the Polish people." If I missed a congress in Lublin he was sure to reprove me later: "I didn't see you at the Railway Workers' Congress, or the War Cripples'." Was this a holdover from his habit as former organizer for the Polish Socialist Party? At any rate, he never missed a congress. He went not merely to speak but to sit in the audience watching and listening. He was hearing something that he thought of as the "voice of the people," in which he has an idealistic faith. I doubt whether he studies the sources of power and the technique of leadership. I judge him an honest but perhaps an unanalytical democrat.

In our first personal conversation he was so friendly and expansive that I allowed myself to ask him: "Why do you think they picked you for the job of chairman?" A bit embarrassed, he answered: "I guess they needed somebody and I was there."

"Perhaps because you're easy to get on with and pleasant to approach," I ventured. "After all the quarreling in Poland, perhaps that is what is needed now." He seemed interested in the idea rather than in the compliment. I doubt whether he gave much thought to the reasons why they chose him as vice-chairman of the first illegal Rada the previous New

Year's Eve. I think he merely accepted it as something the "majority decided."

In prewar days Edward Osubka was a lawyer, an economist and a district organizer of the Polish Socialist Party. In 1939 he helped rally the workers of Warsaw for their famous heroic defense. After this he went underground, taking the name Morawski. (Today he uses both names, hyphenated.) A delegate to the first illegal Rada, he was chosen vice-chairman, partly no doubt because he represented the PPS. Later the delegation of which he was the head scored notable success in Moscow, a fact which doubtless influenced his appointment as chairman of the Committee of Liberation.

Sometimes he is very awkward, at other times his flashing answers show a touch of genius. In my first conversation in his office I told him how hard I found it to make connection with my secretary in Moscow, even to learn whether my news cables had gone through. "I'll help you," he said, picking up his telephone. He spoke into it. "Give me Moscow." I was stunned. Was it really so easy when one had power? Then for ten minutes I saw the chief of government in all the undignified and nervous agony of ordinary mortals who cannot get phone connections. He shouted: "Give me the Polish Embassy. No, no, not the General Staff. Moscow? What? Give me Moscow." He failed to get Moscow in the normal human way. It was hard to imagine a chief of state thus admitting a foreigner to his technical difficulties.

I was in the office of the government newspaper one afternoon when editor Borecza seized the phone and rang up Morawski to apologize. He had neglected to print the latter's speech at the co-operative congress. He hoped Morawski wasn't annoyed. Morawski at once replied: "You're a good editor, it wasn't worth printing." This quick reaction showed almost a genius for harmonious committee work.

My friend Wende told me how Morawski got his new suit. Wende shared a room with Morawski and Minc when they first came to Lublin, "all sleeping on cots soldier style." That was how he knew about the suit.

"When Morawski came out from the underground he was rather shabby. One might almost say ragged. He was having to meet these Russian officers in snappy uniforms. So his adjutant — that chic little kid Witkowski — somehow or other unearthed some decent material and brought it to his chief. But Morawski fought shy of it. 'Why should I wear new stuff when so many Poles go barefoot? My old suit keeps me warm against the cold.'

"Witkowski was unhappy; he wanted a well-dressed chief. He let the rest of us know that he had the material. Finally we all decided that the head of our Committee needed style. So with our blessing the adjutant got a tailor and ushered him into the sanctum of government, saying: 'Everyone thinks you don't look proper for a chief of state. Here's the tailor.' Morawski was too good-natured to object.

"Much of the friendly ease with which the chiefs of our 'resorts' get on together is due to Morawski," Wende added. "I was not well acquainted with him before the war, since I was in the Peasants' Party and he in the Socialist Party. I have learned to know him well in recent months. His informal friendliness makes things go easily, his sincere idealism and lack of personal demand inspire everyone. Who dares demand more for himself than the Prime Minister takes? And Morawski takes just nothing. Half the time he forgets to draw his salary."

Several days later Jan and I were wondering how to get transportation to Maidanek for the execution of the war criminals who helped organize the murders there. I suggested that we try to go in Morawski's car. "Morawski won't go," declared Wende. "He wouldn't see a fly hurt if he could help it."

Seldom have I known a political figure so disarmingly human, so modest, even so self-deprecatory. I have heard PPS officials, willing enough in public to exploit the fact that one of their party headed the government, criticize him in private as "giving too much weight to other parties." His sensitive unwillingness "to see a fly hurt" must make many necessary acts of government painful to him. There were times when he seemed to me "haunted" by all the suffering and conflicts in Poland, so that I wondered how long he could endure.

For months Morawski bore cheerfully a personal situation that would have outraged a man of differ-

ent caliber, of greater selfishness or personal pride. He knew very well that in all possible combinations with the London Poles discussed in those first six months in Lublin, he was the one slated for the sacrifice. Again and again his post was offered as part of the price for agreement. Morawski himself kept journeying regularly to Moscow to help his colleagues invite Mikolajczyk to take his place. Only a man of great statesmanship or great modesty could have done this so pleasantly. In Morawski I think it is chiefly modesty, or perhaps a modesty that at times amounts to statesmanship. Somehow I never see him as a statesman but as a harassed and very friendly man who wants very much to serve the Polish people and is willing to be broken by the task.

Under his chairmanship the Committee was achieving remarkable successes. Of these he was fully aware. "We have done more in four months than that London crowd — all tied up in red tape and legalism — could do in four years," he exulted. But this was a collective victory in which many people supplied initiative and decision. He knew it as such. For the Committee and for Poland he had a very touchy sense of dignity, but he never extended this to himself. Perhaps it was his very lack of self-assertion that made Morawski, as the months went by, the one on whom they could increasingly agree.

Bierut supplied the iron in the Committee. He was the realist who knew always just where he was

going, how far and why. It was he who said to me in mid-December, on his return from one of those Moscow conferences: "Having failed to reach agreement with the Poles in London, we shall ask Morawski to form our government." He spoke with authority; I could not tell whether he was using the collective, the editorial, or the royal "we"!

If Morawski accepts the voice of the majority almost uncritically, Bierut knows how majorities are made. He sees the Polish people not as his adored deity but as human beings in conflict, whose collective will must still be organized. Morawski, I think, might be easily hurt and disillusioned. Bierut, one feels, will never be disillusioned, having already checked and faced the ultimate in calamities. In him, more than in any other, one felt the grim awareness and watchful patience of the underground and its long-endured suffering.

I recall the depth with which he said to me: "Our greatest need is not money, not food, not machines, but people. Our best were killed. My two best friends, who first proposed our Rada, were murdered by the Gestapo in November a year ago."

He was less frequently seen in public than Morawski. He was often ill, possibly from his long hazardous years of revolutionary work. He had been twice jailed in prewar Poland, his last sentence being for seven years. He was an initiator and the president of the first Rada. Even in late 1944 his work in Lublin was partly underground since he dealt with delegates that

came secretly across the German lines. It was he whose analysis crystallized the final decisions in conferences and committees behind the scenes.

When Morawski first introduced us in the intermission at the co-operative congress, Bierut shook hands courteously but with a cool, appraising stare. Besides this direct gaze one remembered from a first encounter only his rather lean face with the clipped mustache above a firm, squarish chin. Otherwise he was undistinguished — the type that could evade the Gestapo as a typical Pole in a crowd of Poles. He was so reserved that I hesitated to ask him for an interview; I felt that I must wait until I had my questions well planned.

A few days later when chatting with Morawski in his office I remarked that I should like sometime to have a talk with Bierut. Morawski quickly took the telephone and after a brief query informed me that Bierut would see me in five minutes. A few moments later he opened a door in his office and showed me directly into Bierut's room. Until that moment I had not known that their offices adjoined, their outer secretaries' offices being several doors apart.

In a large bright corner room with windows on two walls, Bierut sat at his desk, with his back to all the windows and facing both doors like a man on watch. There was no sudden flash of welcoming smile such as Morawski gave instinctively. Bierut rose slightly to greet me and then sat solidly in his chair with the desk between us. He began by asking me questions;

I felt that he was taking my measure before deciding what to say to me.

The telephone broke into our conversation. Somebody worried over the public execution of the six Germans just condemned for their part in Maidanek death camp, and especially doubted whether Maidanek, destined for public memorial, was a suitable place. Was it Morawski, I wondered, whose hesitance came over the telephone? Bierut was calm, reassuring: "The place has been desecrated already; this will help cleanse it." He hung up the phone and asked my opinion. Again I sensed that he wanted this, not to determine his view of the execution, but rather his view of me.

Then suddenly he was answering my questions more clearly and frankly than anyone in Poland had been able to do. I became pleasantly aware that no question would embarrass him or be refused a reply. He had faced all the questions, stated in far bitterer form than I was likely to state them. He had found answers that satisfied him and that he was willing to give. The completeness of his answer might depend on his estimate of the questioner, but it would be clear and direct even if not entirely complete. I realized that he was the chief brains of the Committee, the man who knew what it was all about. After this it was to Bierut that I went for sharp definition of the Committee's aims and methods.

Once when he was ill he received me at his home. He lived a couple of blocks away in an ordinary apart-

ment house – he had not yet moved to the Committee's buildings – but there were armed guards in the hall. This reminded me that people came constantly to him across the battle front and that if the Committee's enemies chose anyone to assassinate, he would naturally be the first. It was on this occasion that I myself felt a warmer understanding of the Polish people than at any time before. They seemed to be struggling so hard against such handicaps in their own nature, and against such weight of past centuries. I am not sure what caused this feeling; possibly it came from seeing Bierut struggle to handle important affairs by telephone, propped up on a couch.

Something of what I felt must have come out in my words or manner; because when I left, Bierut startled me by seizing my hand and kissing it, not with the formality of a diplomat – he did not go in for the Polish hand-kissing tradition – but with the genuine warmth of a comrade. Always after this I knew that there was deep human feeling in Bierut for his Polish people and for anyone who was willing to understand them.

The clearest analysis of the Committee's aims and methods and its differences with the London government-in-exile was given me by Bierut.

"The policy of the government-in-exile was based on false premises. They first believed that the Germans and Russians would wear each other out and that Poland, while remaining passive, could play a great role. When the Red Army began to beat the

Germans, the London Poles counted on conflict between the USSR and the Anglo-Saxon powers, an 'inevitable' conflict in which Poland would automatically gain. Basing their policy on this, they instructed their representatives in Poland and the officers in their Home Army not to 'wear themselves out' against the Germans but to conserve strength so that they might later take power. They were paid for waiting and for loyalty to the London Poles.

"We held this policy mistaken. We held that every Pole must fight for his land. We organized every kind of underground action from illegal teaching of students to partisans fighting in the woods. We hoped first that, as long as we were taking the risks, the London Poles would support this. Their armed bands, however, began killing our people." He paused before adding firmly: "They killed more of our underground fighters than all the Germans did. They were Poles; we could not always know them as enemies. When we saw that they would not support our struggle against the Germans, we formed our underground Rada.

"Our second difference with them lies in our policy of friendship with the USSR as well as with the Western democracies. Prewar Poland based its foreign policy on friendship with distant powers and antagonism to all its neighbors. It banked on France, Britain, and America; it was hostile to Czechs, Lithuanians, Russians, and Ukrainians, taking territory by force from all of them. At first the ruling clique was hostile

also to Germany, but when Hitler gained power they began to lean towards him, admiring the autocracy of his rule.

"This brings us to our third difference. They believe in rule from above. We on the contrary think a country is strong in which every citizen has the chance to use his initiative in work and in politics. In other words, we are for a democratic Poland."

To my question whether he saw any chance of "getting together" with the London Poles, Bierut replied bluntly: "They have nothing to give us. They have no money to give, for they took the gold reserve of Poland and squandered it abroad. They have no experience to give, for they have been absent while we endured the occupation for five years. They only hinder Poland's contacts with her Allies now. None the less we talk with them and try to reach an understanding, because our country is so ruined that it needs complete unity of all Poles. Otherwise our Allies will say: 'Poles always quarrel, whom shall we help?' Foreign powers won't trust a quarreling people."

Bierut related in some detail his discussions with Mikolajczyk in Moscow. For four months the Committee had not only been willing to accept Mikolajczyk as Prime Minister but Bierut personally urged him at that time to come — on certain conditions: the 1921 Constitution, the land reform, friendship with the USSR, and cessation of civil strife. According to Bierut, Mikolajczyk professed personal agreement on

all these points but must "first consult his colleagues" in London.

"He is a legalist. He felt that his obligations to the 1935 Constitution, which he admitted was illegally passed but which none the less was passed, bound him to the decisions of the London group."

It was about this time that I felt that I could put any questions I wished to Bierut. So I raised flatly the question of Poland's independence. How far did it go? "What financial help, for instance, did you get from the USSR?"

He didn't turn a hair at the question. "Most of all," he replied, "the help in arming and equipping our army. Without the help of the USSR we could have nothing like our present army."

"Was this help a long-term loan?"

"No. I raised this question last spring with Marshal Stalin. He replied: 'We do not trade in the blood of our Allies.' "

Bierut added that the USSR was giving some "lesser but very important aid in restoring Polish industry." This was a short-term loan, not in money but in machines and materials, repayable in kind.

"But doesn't a government need cash? Wasn't there some general loan?"

"We didn't even ask for one," smiled Bierut. "We are modest in our demands. We expect to live from taxes and food deliveries. Before these began coming we did need a certain amount of currency but" — here his smile grew quizzical — "we just printed that."

Yes, Bierut knew without illusions just what you could get away with in Poland in 1944–1945.

As I came out from Bierut I paused in the outer office to make a phone call. Three Russian officers entered in very top-notch uniforms, dazzling with decorations and resplendent with gold and scarlet braid. The two young Polish officers serving as Bierut's pages snapped to attention and ushered the visitors in to the President with utmost decorum.

Almost before the door closed one of the lads gave a wild jig dance and threw out his arms in a gesture that shouted to his fellow — and to all and sundry, including me — as plainly as any American boy could say it: "Gee! What swell company we keep!"

General Michal Rola-Zymierski was commander in chief of the army. He is a rotund, affable man whose military bearing disguises his fifty-four years. He sat at ease in his well-lighted office to give me my first interview. He looked a bit surprised when I swung my portable typewriter onto his table — a habit I formed in the informal Lublin atmosphere — but he readily accepted my explanation that this would save time and insure exact quotation. He took it as the American way. For an hour or more he dictated in a friendly, businesslike manner his replies to my questions about his life, the Polish Army, and even the characteristics of different generals. He did not know that I was also taking down notes on his graying hair, starred epaulettes with zigzag bar, dark blue velvet

tabs embroidered with the Polish eagle, and the double row of gold teeth that illumined his face when he smiled.

Zymierski is no new general risen from the ranks in wartime. He was a Polish officer before there was an independent Polish state. He trained officers for Polish regiments in Austria before the first World War. He was a chief organizer of the February 1918 "action" whereby Pilsudski's Polish Legions broke with the Central Powers. During the young Poland's alliance with France he served on the French General Staff after graduating from a French military academy. In 1924 he became vice-minister of war in Poland under General Sikorski.

A bright career lay ahead for the young officer. He wore by this time several decorations from his own government, as well as the Belgian Cross of Leopold and the French Legion of Honor. But Zymierski had the fortune to be a democrat. In 1926 he opposed Pilsudski's *coup d'état*. The new dictatorship soon found reasons for expelling him from the army and jailing him. After his release he lived in France until 1939, returning to Poland in her hour of need. For several months in 1939 he passionately urged swift modernization of the army. His suggestions were scornfully rejected. "The Polish Army is quite adequate, we won't lose a button from a soldier's uniform" was the classic claim of Rydz-Smigly, the commander in chief who lost all Poland.

Zymierski made his final appeal to the General

Staff on the fourth day of the German blitz. "We have accepted battle in disadvantageous frontier areas with no natural or prepared defense. The enemy pincers are cutting our armies to pieces. I propose quick withdrawal from the German traps to a strong line based on the Vistula, gaining time to mobilize full reserves. The German war machine is not yet at full strength; we may hold the Vistula until the situation in Europe changes or until England comes to our aid." The War Office generals ordered Zymierski to stop discussing the war under penalty of court-martial as a defeatist; his "Vistula line" meant an initial retreat. Two days later this same General Staff fled in panic, leaving the Polish Army in chaos and without command.

"In 1940 General Sikorski and I tried to give the French General Staff the benefit of our Polish experience," said Zymierski to me. "We told them: 'Thus the Germans fight, thus one should meet them.'" The French also were deaf. France also fell.

Then General Zymierski vanished. In Poland appeared a man named Rola, an organizer of partisans. Zymierski was underground with a new name. "I did not even approach my wife and children lest the Germans identify me," he said.

He sought contact with all underground political parties and with the delegates of the government-in-exile. "I sent word to London that their tactics with the Home Army were wrong. Their watchful-waiting policy was demoralizing the Home Army, allowing it

to become permeated with enemy agents. Instead of fighting Germans it turned to fighting Polish partisans. I reported this to London time and again in vain."

The general's divergence from London was sharpened when the Germans invaded Russia. "The Home Army considered the Bolsheviks enemies more than the Germans. They shot Russian war prisoners trying to escape. I considered Russians our fighting allies. We helped Russian prisoners escape, even giving our own arms to them. When I finally got to Moscow I told Stalin: 'We gave you arms, now give to us.' "

"Did he?" I asked. The general grinned.

"The increasing brutality of the Germans pushed the Home Army into conflict with them. They then concentrated on assassinating especially obnoxious Gestapo chiefs. They avoided on principle any attack on German communications eastward, their policy being to let Germans and Russians 'wear each other out.' " Zymierski's partisans, on the contrary, concentrated on destroying German communications as a direct military contribution to their "Russian allies." Zymierski himself traveled to partisan groups all over Poland, training and inspecting them. "I was the only general who took to the woods," he said laughing. At the end of 1943 when the newly formed Rada Narodowa decided to organize the People's Army underground, they made Zymierski their commander in chief.

"In early 1944 we sent our first delegation to Moscow. Contact with the Red Army was needed, for it was drawing near. We also knew by radio of General Berling's Polish army. I did not go with the first delegation, but when Stalin learned from Morawski of our partisans he sent a plane for me."

It was an adventurous trip the general made to Moscow. The first plane crashed in the take-off, dropping from six hundred feet. The general was the only occupant unhurt. "I held fast to the plane's structure while it broke around me. Then I helped carry the injured to the woods. We burned the plane and hid immediately; four hours later the Germans were there. It took five days to evade them and make a landing field for a second plane. When we crossed the front we dropped to ninety feet to avoid the ack-ack, but we ran into ground shooting and got fifteen holes from machine-gun bullets in our wings."

After that Moscow visit Zymierski's action was correlated with the Red Army from which he received arms and liaison officers. When the Red Army entered Polish territory, the army of General Berling — a hundred thousand Poles organized in Russia — came under Zymierski's command. Berling's army was larger and far better equipped than Zymierski's woodsmen, but Zymierski was unquestionably the senior general. Besides, it was recognized that the man who had raised an armed force in Poland under occupation was entitled to lead. Zymierski combined his partisans with Berling's army and ordered a gen-

eral draft of new recruits. From these three elements came the new Polish Army of today.

General Zymierski personally escorted me in his gallant Polish manner through the outer office as far as the door. A half dozen aides sprang to attention with a snap that seemed to rock the room. This impeccably-turned-out general had secured a very martial discipline in the few months since he left the woods.

Strictly speaking, the erudite Dr. Hilary Minc did not class as a chief of state. Bierut the realist, Morawski the idealist, Zymierski the military chief formed the triumvirate. But to make that triangle into the solid square foundation for building a nation, Minc was needed, the economist and the reconstructor of Polish industry. He had all the facts on industry, finance, and even agriculture and labor more completely, accurately, and fruitfully catalogued than anyone else I met. I rate him personally as a chief of state because of his economic brains.

"Minc is our real highbrow," an irreverent Polpress reporter told me, adding that Dr. Minc had three university degrees — one taken in Poland, one in France, and one as a refugee in the USSR. "History, law, and economics are his specialties."

Dr. Minc never delivered facts casually, but always in completed sequence. It was as if it pained him to release a fact without its before and after. He gave me information willingly and comprehensively, but

never in dinner chat; I went to his office with my portable and took it down. I was amazed by the organized clarity of his knowledge, but amused by the pedantic exactness with which he timed his discourse — precisely fifty minutes — like a college professor filling a classroom period. The second time I was ten minutes late. He reproved me mildly. "We will not quite finish this subject today."

So it is from Dr. Hilary Minc that I quote the plans for a Poland soundly based on economic geography and the necessities of life.

"Poland is among the countries that suffered the most in loss of population and in destruction of industry, farming, and housing. Its condition is much worse than that of Czechoslovakia; it compares with Jugoslavia. In parts of the USSR the destruction was greater than in Poland, but much of the USSR was uninvaded while all of Poland suffered.

"There are three possible sources for repairing our war losses: internal resources, foreign aid from allies, and reparations from the enemy.

"Without doubt we will mobilize our internal resources but it would take decades to return even to our prewar standard of living on the basis of these alone. The destruction in our country resembles that of the seventeenth century in Germany and Bohemia after the Thirty Years' War. Even one hundred years later these lands were still broken, remaining behind the rest of Europe. Such a fate we cannot accept.

"The question of foreign aid is still premature. We

must however note that the type and size of foreign loans will depend on the guarantees that Poland can offer, which in turn will depend on our basic resources. This leads to our demand for increasing territory to the north and west.

"What reparations can we get from Germany to repair what the Germans destroyed? Germany cannot give enough in money or goods to make up for the destruction she has done. Our only chance to get what we need — seed, livestock, iron and steel, machines, trucks, motors, cement, glass — is to widen Poland to the west by taking industrial territory, lands once Polish which have been Germanized. These territories are of two kinds: East Prussia, the annexation of which would destroy the spearhead of German imperialism and give us access to the Baltic, and the western lands up to the Oder and Niessa, from which the Poles were pushed in the course of centuries by successive German aggressions.

"This means moving our entire country westward. It means changing Poland from an agricultural country to a land of balanced industry, farming and commerce, from a multi-national state to a national state. We have then the following picture: —

"First, strategic safety. Whatever the peace terms there is always the possibility of a new German aggression twenty or twenty-five years hence, perhaps in even worse forms than Hitlerism. The Polish people could not biologically survive such another catastrophe. This question is therefore one of life or death. By

liquidating East Prussia and fixing our frontier along the Oder and Niessa, we get the shortest, strongest possible frontier and make it impossible for an enemy to converge on us from three directions as in the present war.

"Second, our economic life would change entirely. The farmlands of the east — whose big landlords were Poles, though the estates were chiefly farmed by Ukrainian and White Russian peasants — go now to the USSR. We get in return industrial areas, seventy to eighty million tons of coal, a developed steel production and machine-building industry in which a considerable part of the working class has always been Polish. Instead of a funny corridor to the sea, we gain a wide approach with some two hundred miles of seacoast, thus rounding out our economic life with commerce and fisheries.

"Third, we eliminate many internal dissensions. In losing the eastern areas we get rid of our most reactionary feudal elements and eliminate our chief national minority problem. We acquire in the west those industrial classes that will help build a progressive democracy. At the same time we destroy the feudal elements of East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia, those strongholds of German big landlordism. The great Prussian estates were built on the blood and bones of Slavs. It is historic justice if they go into the hands of the Polish peasants.

"Such a Poland, with safe frontiers, with our chief problem of national minorities removed, with indus-

try well-developed and with access to the sea, can quickly recover from the war. It will not be the old, backward, semi-feudal Poland, a source of unrest and a danger to the peace of Europe, but a sound, progressive state whose people need not lag behind the other European peoples in prosperity."

Dr. Hilary Minc seemed entirely convinced of the possibility of this all but utopian future; his was the most businesslike statement I heard of Poland's claims.

CHAPTER V

The New Polish Army

A NEW Polish Army was advancing across Poland to "set banners in Berlin." Everywhere mention of this army brought the loudest applause. Greetings with which the populace met the Red Army increased markedly when Polish detachments appeared. Peasant assemblies cheering the land reform cheered still more loudly the young speakers in uniform who told them, "Your title deeds to the land are underwritten by our bayonets."

This army with the white-red banners and the Polish eagle was to millions of Poles the clearest symbol of hope that Poland would again be free and strong. The prewar Polish Army had been scattered and destroyed; its General Staff had fled to Rumania and England. Some of its officers were dead, some still in German prison camps; others, for a time interned in the USSR, had joined the Anders army and reached the Italian front. Some of the soldiers had managed to get home to their farms; others were slaves in Germany or dispersed across the world.

The new Polish Army was composed of three ele-

ments: the First Army of one hundred thousand formed among Polish refugees in the Soviet Union by General Sigmund Berling; the Polish partisans who had operated on Polish soil during the occupation; and the new recruits mobilized since the liberation.

At the time of my first visit the new Polish Army was some two hundred thousand strong. It was operationally under the Red Army for the joint war against Germany. The Polish Army however took its oath of allegiance to Poland and to the Rada Narodowa as representing the democratic organizations of the Polish people. It carried the white-red standard of Poland; its soldiers had eagles on their caps where the Russians had red stars. Polish soldiers took part in and often formed the spearhead for spectacular advances across Poland. Polish soldiers, not Russian, formed the guards for all official Polish government buildings and the garrisons in the most important Polish towns.

Every morning in Lublin I was awakened by Polish soldiers chanting the "Rota," their pledge. It is devout in tone; when I first heard it I thought it was a hymn. This famous poem by Maria Konoplitza, written early in the century during the struggle of partitioned Poland against German oppression, pledges never to let Polish earth be held by strangers. Every stanza ends "So may God help us." The chanted poem now forms part of the morning and evening army ritual before prayers. The chaplains and daily religious

services of the Polish Army are another indication of its difference from the Red Army.

At this time the troops of the First Polish Army were seasoned by more than a year of war. They had first battled at Lenina near Smolensk in October 1943; here the Kosciusko division broke the German front. In July 1944 the First Polish helped force the Bug River and swept for two hundred miles across Poland, cheered and kissed all the way. As this great drive spent itself, it broke across the Vistula at Pulawy, south of Warsaw, establishing the bridgehead for the next offensive. Then in September, with detachments of the Red Army, the First Polish Army fought its way into Praga from the south through the strongest German fortifications in Poland, to establish itself on the eastern bank of the Vistula.

Polish partisans, especially those under General Zymierski, co-operated as the Red Army and the First Polish Army approached. Striking the Germans from the rear they disorganized enemy communications and turned the retreat into a rout. They rescued peasants who were being deported to Germany as slaves. They policed liberated towns pending the organization of the Polish civil government. As soon as possible they were incorporated into the regular Polish Army, the rank of all partisan officers being preserved.

A national draft of able-bodied men between nineteen and thirty-five was simultaneously declared, regional draft boards being set up in all large centers. Only the younger age groups were called for serv-

ice in the rank and file, older men being inducted only if they were specialists. The Second Polish Army, still training in December 1944, was formed of partisans and these new recruits, stiffened by veterans from the First Army.

On a gorgeous December dawn I set out for the training camps at Chelm. By army time it was already nine o'clock, the entire eastern front being synchronized to Moscow. By Polish civilian time, which follows the Central European, it was only seven. On the sharp rolling horizon the pale morning sky was cut by an occasional church or cluster of thatched houses. The earth was green with the young winter rye planted in long strips — the old peasant three-field system little changed since the days of tsarist Russia. The peasants seemed to have done well with their winter sowing.

The stretch from Lublin to Chelm, taken by that rapid sweep of the Red Army to the Vistula, bore fewer traces of war damage than other areas in liberated Poland. Signs at the approach to every town listed in Russian and in Polish the army facilities of the place. Thus Chelm announced: "This town contains rest rooms, auto repair station, food depot, restaurant, hospital." This information was clearly for the benefit of passing troops. The training camps were not listed, their location being secret in the neighboring woods.

We found the army headquarters in a group of villas outside the town. The commander of the tank corps planned our tour. In a single day, he told us,

we could not visit all the camps in the vicinity, for they were scattered over considerable distances and not easily reached in this season of mud. We decided to cover the motorized infantry, the tank training corps, and the artillery officers' school.

The clear dawn had given way to drizzle by the time our sturdy jeep had traveled over several miles of mud road to reach the motorized infantry on the edge of a wood. The camp, we found, was entirely made of *zemlyankas* — dugouts. A long straight lane led for nearly a mile through the woods. It was sanded underfoot, bordered by neat rustic fencing and screened from airplanes by the branching tops of pines. Set back from the path some twenty feet or more were the rows of dugouts, some two feet of side wall showing under sloping roofs covered with moss, pine needles, or sand. It was like a town of log cabins sunk four or five feet in the earth.

"We learned this trick from the Russians," explained our host, Colonel Czerwinski. "*Zemlyankas* are more comfortable than tents and almost as quickly set up anywhere in the woods. The German habit of billeting men in villages not only inconveniences the population but does not suit the precise needs of a military organization. Here we have all our men in one place in a camp of exactly the required size and position; this makes for good discipline. Pine woods are also much cleaner than a village.

"Here is our staff office," the colonel continued, as he led the way down four steps into a small entry

under a peaked roof. He lifted an ingeniously carved wooden latch and the axe-hewn door swung on modern metal hinges. We found ourselves in a warm, well-lit cabin about twenty by thirty feet in size and divided into two rooms. The walls and floors were of split logs with the smooth side inward; with their protection and with the heat from an iron stove in the larger front room we were not conscious of the damp day outside.

The first room was the office where at three large tables, under a skylight and with light from windows in the walls just under the roof, several officers were working on maps. Electric lamps when needed were supplied from the camp motor. At the rear of the office a wide arch led into a bedroom with four cots; these were of split logs covered with bags of straw. As a veteran Seattle camper I judged the accommodations were more comfortable than the tents and camp beds we had used many summers on Mount Rainier.

We walked the length of the main path and dropped into several dugouts on the way; a post office, a recreation club, and some of the men's quarters. They were all similar in construction, but stoves varied according to the skill of the inhabitants, many being contrived from big oil cans. The men's dugouts accommodated twenty and had fewer windows.

"Window glass is a problem," remarked the colonel. "There is none yet made in Poland. The boys salvage it from ruined houses."

The roofs showed signs of proud artistry. Some

were unbroken mossy carpets, others were dotted with patterns of acorns and leaves, while still others, in the less wooded spaces, were smooth with yellow sand sometimes crowned with one or two baby pines. Everywhere they toned with the landscape, making the dugouts almost unnoticeable from a short distance. Shelters for arms and equipment were set between the dugouts. Rifles, tommy guns, and helmets stood on racks in the open air, immediately available but protected by steep, straw roofs. Throughout the camp, but especially in front of the dugouts, were many decorations cunningly contrived of moss, broken bits of white crockery, and red brick. A favorite was the Polish eagle in red and white mosaic with the motto "In union is strength" of white crockery set in green moss.

"We built the entire camp in five days," the colonel boasted, "but of course not all the decorations. The roofs are covered for warmth, for camouflage, and also for beauty."

The bathhouse was the colonel's pride. "Like a city bath – handles sixty men at a time." This large half-underground dugout had an entry with log benches on which to put clothes, a main bathroom where water was poured from showers and basins, and the popular hot-steam room. Water had to be hauled for the bath, but after use it ran off between the split logs of the floor and by a drain to a cesspool deep in the sandy soil.

At the far end of the camp new recruits were kept

in quarantine for ten days. One newly arrived group was still in civvies. I seized the chance to talk with Polish villagers selected not as delegates to some conference but merely by army draft of able-bodied young men. These were all from one village. After the first few questions, a man with a black stubble of beard seemed to become spokesman while the others nodded general approval to his words.

"Has the Red Army been through your village?"

"Of course, first the Red Army and then the Polish Army."

"How did they behave?"

"Behave? They're quiet folks. Like Poles."

"Have you had the land reform?"

"Yes. We divided five thousand acres among the peasants; it was a single estate."

"What happened to the landlord?"

"He went away with the Germans; he had a German soul. He'll get no Polish land again. If anyone wants Polish land let him live in dugouts with us and fight for it."

"Was the land justly divided?"

The man with the black bristling chin shrugged. "Who can say what is just? It is the law."

"I mean was the division justly made among the peasants, so that each got a fair share?"

"Oh, that! But of course. We did that ourselves. If the land was good or near the village then eight acres; if far away or not so good, then twelve acres. I chose eight acres that were near because I also do work in

the village sometimes as carpenter. Now that I'm in the army my wife will work the land."

"What kind of government do you have in your village?" I meant the question politically, but they took it technically.

"The government is the *gmina* — township. For the land reform there is a special commission of delegates from each village under the county land agent."

"Who rules in the *gmina?*" I persisted. Seeing the confused looks, I explained, "Have you the same officials as the ones who were under the Germans?"

Everyone grinned. Then one man said, "We chased them out." Another qualified, "Well, some could stay if they were all right, but not those with German souls."

"How did you get the new ones?"

"We chose them, of course." They were obviously bored by this conversation on what seemed to them the most commonplace village affairs. They much preferred some romantic subject like America. At first they hesitated and then finally ventured: Was I the American representative? Was America sending somebody to Poland? No? How then did I get here? Had I been in Detroit? In Chicago? One of them had a brother, another a cousin, in those cities.

On the way back to the colonel's dugout we came to an altar under the trees for morning and evening prayers. The chaplain of the camp told me that he had also served in the prewar Polish Army but "hid

out as a shepherd under the German occupation and thus escaped and lived."

"Did the Germans kill priests?" I asked.

"Except for the few who taught according to their Nazi precepts. Others were doomed unless they managed to hide."

The "political officer" accompanying us, in general charge of community welfare, told me that the new recruits needed not only military training but education for citizenship.

"We must root out the evil habits acquired under Nazi rule." To my query as to what was the chief of these, he answered, "Drunkenness."

"Drunkenness, cheating, graft, thieving, speculation grew rife under the occupation. Suppressed people try to forget or to beat the game illegally. Besides, when rulers insist for five years that you are 'inferior,' it breaks normal self-respect. Idleness and sabotage became virtues — a way of outwitting the oppressors. They are bad hangovers now." He added that there was considerable illiteracy because schools were few and far between under the Nazis. "In five years young folks grew up who could not read. Even in this special technical corps we have 10 per cent illiterates among new recruits; in ordinary infantry the percentage is higher. One of the first things our political department does is to establish classes for those who must learn to read and write.

"The Nazi occupation," he concluded, "has left a

terrible heritage of demoralization in Europe. This it is my task to fight."

I met the colonel's wife at his dugout and recognized the stocky woman whom I had seen earlier at the post office sorting out mail. "She is camp postmistress," smiled the colonel. "My seventeen-year-old son is also here as my chauffeur. If you have to go to war why not take the family?"

The touch of a good housewife was apparent in the dugout. The iron stove was plastered in like a Dutch oven; there was a comfortable divan; the table had a green plush cover, and there were pictures and a looking glass on the wall. A telephone stood as normally on a table as in a city home.

"Can you call Moscow on that?" I said jokingly.

Czerwinski grinned. "Not on that but on this." He turned on a portable radio and strains of chamber music flooded the room.

Nothing in the cabin indicated that we were half underground. Sitting on the sofa I saw through the window the tops of tall pines against the limpid sky. I felt myself in a comfortable vacation resort.

Mrs. Colonel Czerwinski whisked off the green plush cover and replaced it with a white tablecloth and a fancy centerpiece. She apologized profusely for having to offer us "pot luck." "I got dinner after I saw you," she explained. Yet in that hour and a half she had prepared a staggering repast.

Hors d'oeuvres were on the scale of a Swedish *smörgåsbord* with the fifty-seven varieties of cold

meats and pickles, including a mixture of red and white pickled cabbage that my hostess dubbed "vitamin salad"; the army has become vitamin conscious in this war. The tasty bread was in large cubes. Drinks included bottled beer, a red, sourish wine, and a potent old-fashioned home-brewed honey mead. After this satisfying start came a second course of tenderest, delicious liver stewed in an onion gravy with boiled potatoes so mealy that they were falling apart. My hostess regretted that she hadn't had time to French fry them, for which I was grateful. The third course was the national Polish dish called *bigos* — cabbage, onions, and sausage steamed together — far more savory than the kind dished out in Lublin. Then came ox tongues — four large whole ones — from which we carved out chunks instead of slices. With after-dinner tea came honey cake and twisted sugared pastry known as *khrusts* — Polish crisps.

Our talk turned to the place of women in the army. Mrs. Czerwinski related an incident about the mobilization of Polish girls from the western Ukraine who joined the army as it passed through because they wanted to go to Poland. Two girls came to her for advice; they hesitated to join the army, for they were told that this would kill their chance of a decent marriage. The colonel guffawed.

"The best place to find a man and to be sure of him is in the army. If an army girl is a nice girl she gets her pick. And it's a good place to test your man, too. An army comrade is a tried and true comrade.

Only when we go into attack — " he threw a glance at his wife — "I want her as far in the rear as possible."

The colonel's lady protested. "We've lived together twenty years. If he's got to be killed, why shouldn't it be together?" It was very clear that the colonel did not agree.

Czerwinski had joined the Red Army in the Russian Revolution when Poland was still part of Russia; he had served there for twenty-four years. In all that time he never once wrote to his old mother in her Polish village "for fear they'd persecute her if they knew she had a son in the Red Army." When at last the fortunes of war brought him home his own mother did not at once recognize him. When he revealed himself, she fell in a faint; as soon as she came to, the colonel presented his wife and son. This convinced the old woman, for the boy was the image of the father when he had left.

"But they don't have families in Russia," the perplexed old village woman still protested. "Children are taken by the state."

"Not a bit of it! He's mine and now he's come back to Poland. Feel him, Mamma, isn't he a husky?"

The afternoon was far advanced before we could tear ourselves away from the Czerwinskis. We cut our visit to the tank corps to a whirlwind trip.

Deep in mud, our jeep slithered up banks and down into gullies, several times almost overturning. An hour of this brought us to another camp similarly situated

in a woods. Along the edge where the trees gave way to an open field stood a long row of green tanks, solid, medium size, Russian-made. They were sunk in pits a yard deep; wood-burning stoves in still lower pits kept the motors warm; green tarpaulins protected them. A tank crew climbed in to give us a demonstration. Grunting noisily, the green beast swayed a bit, gathered itself for an effort, and then with a great heave climbed out of the pit and rumbled across the field.

"These boys have been in training here three months," said the camp commander, as the tank backed slowly into its lair.

We came at dusk to the artillery officers' school in Chelm. The splendid five-story building with more than four hundred rooms had served as railway administration for prewar Poland and for the regional Gestapo under Nazi rule. When the Red Army took Chelm they found the basement full of filth, blood, and corpses where prisoners had been tortured and put to death. Now in the same basement was a well-ordered officers' dining room where our "tea" turned out to include cold meats, large decorated mounds of butter, luscious pastries, and wine.

Sixteen hundred cadets were here in training as future artillery officers. The school was in constant battle with wartime shortages. The electric lights flickered for a moment as we entered and then went out. This happened two or three times a week, for the Germans had destroyed the local power plant and they

were temporarily switched to the overburdened Lublin system. The young cadets insisted on showing us over the entire five floors by the light of candles, with which they made a continuous procession, raising them aloft to illuminate the banners, posters, and slogans with which the various groups adorned their walls.

The school was primitive in equipment but modern in method. Many tables and benches in the classrooms were made of hand-hewn logs or of primary school benches lifted on trestles. This rude foundation supported fine models made by the cadets, landscapes on which they worked out artillery ranges. On the hardwood floor of the bedrooms were rows of pallets laid out with beautiful precision. Bedsteads and springs were lacking, but the floor was so polished that one could have eaten from it. When I praised the immaculate order they replied: "Of course. This is the army!"

At tea the school's chaplain, another priest who hid out during the German occupation, told us that the commandant gave him every facility for his religious work and that the response of the men was good. The instructor on my right was a Russian distinguished by six medals and decorations: medals for the defense of Moscow and Stalingrad, the Order of the Red Banner for the forcing of the Don, and three orders won in the Finnish War for artillery work that helped smash the Mannerheim Line.

"The London Poles would mistrust your presence

here," I smiled. He shrugged this aside as of little account.

"After the first World War Poland had French instructors for her army. How many Poles could you find today who could teach from actual battle experience of modern artillery?"

We finished our tea by candlelight. A sudden blaze of electricity lit up the entire building just as we said farewell.

The new Polish Army was constantly emphasizing its differences from the past. What were these differences? For an authoritative answer I went to General Alexander Zawadzki, vice-commander in chief of the army, in control of army policy.

"We call our army a 'democratic army,' " he told me. "By this we mean that our soldiers are expected also to be citizens, and to defend a democratic regime. We tell them: 'You are not set above the people. You are the armed sons of the people. Your problems are those of Polish peasants, Polish workers, Polish intellectuals. You must understand their problems and defend their civil rights.'

"In every country you find people who demand that the army be 'divorced from politics.' These are usually reactionaries who don't want soldiers discussing the problems of a democracy. Every army in the world is the instrument of some kind of policy, that is, of politics. The prewar Polish Army was the instrument of the notorious 'regime of colonels' that

went to smash in 1939. Soldiers had to 'obey without back-talk.' The prewar army obeyed not only when ordered to slay Ukrainian peasants in Eastern Poland but even when ordered to shoot down striking, starved Polish peasants around Cracow.

"We don't want robots in our army! Let the soldier know for what he fights! Let him know that the Polish Army is part of the Polish people and that only such an army is strong in defense."

"How far do you go in encouraging politics in the army? Do you let different political parties promote their differences?"

"Nobody would be allowed to promote a fascist view in the army. Our soldiers take the oath to support a democratic Poland and the Rada Narodowa's authority. Representatives of the four democratic parties are to be found among our political officers; we give no preference among these parties. They all stand on the platform of the Committee of National Liberation. Differences of interpretation occur among our political officers, but partisan attacks on another democratic party would be out of place in the army."

A new type of officer is naturally needed for a new kind of army. In seeking these, said General Zawadzki, "we draw from soldiers and noncoms who show ability to lead. We fight the idea that officers are a separate caste. They are citizens with specialized military abilities. Formerly money and family were decisive in admission to officers' schools. In prewar Poland the concept of 'the honor of an officer' was quite feudal.

"Among our prewar officers, contempt for the democratic nations was very common. Instructors in army academies openly said: 'How weak with their squabbling parliaments are Britain and France and Czechoslovakia! Germany and Italy have strong hands!' We teach our officers the contrary. See what nations win in the end, we say! The democratic powers where common folk have something to defend!"

Zawadzki added that there were "hundreds of the old officers" in the present army. "Some of them have risen very fast. We recognize all ranks received in any Polish army, whether the prewar army, the various armies of the underground, or the army fighting abroad. This applies also to officers of the Home Army if they join us openly. We have had however considerable trouble with Home Army officers who conceal their past status and join to disrupt us."

Details of political training and of difficulties with Home Army officers were given me, at the general's request, by Colonel Victor Grosz, Chief of the Political Department — that is, in operational charge of these matters. He showed me a sheaf of a typical day's reports from "political officers" of various army units. The engineers had had a lecture on the Fifth Column, the antiaircraft forces on "Military Secrecy — What Can Be Written Home." One unit had discussed the land reform, another "Why Poland Fell in 1939 and How Poland Can Rise Again." Several units near the front had discussed leaflets that the Germans dropped.

"We don't hide the propaganda that the Germans throw down," stated the colonel. "We show how stupid it is. The simplest Polish soldier laughs when the Germans write: 'You aren't in the Polish Army but the Bolshevik Army! Shoot your officers and come over to us and we guarantee you a free Poland.' Lately the Germans have been a bit cleverer. They say: 'Your true Polish Government is in London'; or 'The British and Americans have betrayed you to Stalin.' It is getting hard to distinguish between German leaflets and those put out by the London Poles; we don't know which copies the other! This also we point out to the soldiers, that the Germans and the Home Army often use the same slogans."

How serious was the friction with the Home Army? I asked the colonel's opinion. Prime Minister Churchill had been intimating in Parliament that unless the "Polish question" was settled the different loyalties of different armed groups of Poles might break into civil war. Grosz scouted the idea.

"There is no unified Home Army. Widespread, disciplined unity is very hard to maintain in underground groups. There were all kinds of underground groups in occupied Poland. Some were just men who took to the woods for safety and lived by loot; other groups had political convictions. Among the latter were our People's Army under General Zymierski and armed forces of the Peasant Party – the various 'Peasant Battalions' – who more or less co-operated with us. Some Home Army units co-operated with

us in special actions against Germans; others would not. The most reactionary groups were those known as NSZ (*Narodowe Sily Zbrogne* — National Armed Forces). These are terrorists who murdered Jews and radicals or betrayed them to the Gestapo. The London Poles accepted their allegiance and counted them as part of the Home Army, but certainly not all Home Army units were of this type.

"When the Red Army and the First Polish Army came over the border, the Committee of National Liberation ordered all underground bands of whatever political complexion to dissolve their organizations and surrender their arms as soon as their territory was freed. They were then accepted and reorganized as regulars in our new Polish Army, with recognition of all past ranks. The People's Army, most of the Peasants' Battalions, and some of the Home Army detachments followed these instructions loyally. But some Home Army units, and especially a considerable number of officers, hid from mobilization or entered the Polish Army under false names, for purposes of disruption and even murder."

Colonel Grosz brought out a report from a training camp. A former Home Army officer joined up as a private and quickly became a noncom, concealing his name and his past. "A panic began one night in his section of the camp. New recruits were shouting: 'We won't let them take us to Siberia!' Somebody had started the crazy idea that they were to be sent to Siberia. A lot of men ran away to the woods where an

underground Home Army unit was waiting for them. Within a couple of days most of our men came back, looking very sheepish. We learned then that the supposed noncom was a fairly high officer who had caused the panic. Such tricks are annoying but not dangerous. It was more serious when somebody gave poisoned alcohol to soldiers in Praga. We are checking to see whether this was a German agent or an agent of the London Poles. We don't know yet. Their actual practice is increasingly the same."

The chief threat presented by the Home Army, according to Grosz, was not to the new Polish Army but to unarmed civilians, especially to agents of the Committee of Liberation, carrying out the land reform. Many scores of such civilians had been murdered. Home Army officers who co-operated loyally with the Polish Army were also in peculiar danger from former associates. Major Kropiwnicki, a former Home Army officer who, in the new Polish Army, became chief of recruiting for Zamosc district, was shot in the back while addressing peasants in a public square. Bands of the NSZ were also occasionally raiding small towns, killing Jews.

"This is not civil war. It is plain banditry and murder," concluded Grosz. "It threatens the peace and order of some communities but is no serious danger to either the strength of our new Polish Army or the stability of the Polish state."

CHAPTER VI

Warsaw Front

I WAS the first American to crawl into dugouts and crouch in trenches directly facing German fire on the eastern front. For three years the foreign correspondents in Moscow, including many young men war correspondents, tried vainly to reach front line positions of the eastern front. In the end it was I, a woman, who reached it through the hospitality of the Poles.

When I told my Lublin friends that I wanted to go to Warsaw – more specifically to Praga, that eastern part of the capital already in Polish hands – they began to discourage me. Though Warsaw was only a hundred miles away the communication was poor and rumors were many, even in the government dining room. The Germans were dropping V-2s, the terrible rocket! The people were fleeing in panic! The city administration under Colonel Spychalski had withdrawn a dozen miles south to the town of Otwodsk! The last auto truck out of Praga had barely escaped by a wide detour east!

When I finally reached the city – by jeep, chaper-

oned by a young Polish lieutenant — I learned the facts behind the rumors. We detoured into town, since the main highway was under artillery fire. The city administration was where it had been on Otwodsk Street in the heart of Praga. Two rocket bombs had fallen and one of them had demolished an apartment house, but not even the most uninformed civilian thought that they were the terrible V-2s. Meanwhile the population was returning to Praga; it had reached one hundred and twenty thousand.

The battle front cut through the city of Warsaw. The Red Army, and with it the Polish First, fought their way into the eastern part of the city in September 1944. Here the Vistula water barrier checked the advance. The retreating Germans blew up the four fine bridges connecting the two parts of the Polish capital. The western bank of the river — four fifths of Warsaw — was still in their hands. Praga, the industrial section on the eastern bank, was held by the Red Army, its river-front positions being entrusted to the Poles.

In this battered hulk of a city one felt the pride of a national capital much more than in Lublin, which was after all a provincial town. One felt the undying spirit of Poland which has seen and survived the wars of centuries. Warsaw had fought three bitter battles already in the present war and was awaiting a fourth. Its heroic defense in 1939 under Mayor Starzynski after the Polish Government had fled the country won admiration from the world. The battle of the doomed

WARSAW FRONT

Jews of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 opened a new page in the history of international Jewry, stimulating revolts in many cities. Of General Bor's ill-fated uprising in August of 1944 I shall speak in the following chapter. At this same time the Red Army and the Polish First were battling for Praga, hammering their way through the strongest German fortifications in Poland. They were now entrenched, awaiting the decisive battle which should give Warsaw and all Poland into their hands.

Behind the first-line river positions, civilian Praga was part of the fighting front. People lived here under daily enemy fire, bought and sold bread in market places from which they could all but see the German guns. Nearly every day some apartment house, school, or public building was demolished, often with many human casualties. The people seemed less worried by this spasmodic shelling than by the lack of water and electric lights.

The grimness of civilian life in Praga smote me in the very first hour. The efficient woman in military uniform who looked after visitors at the City Hall — her first name was Stephanie and her last name I never even tried to pronounce — rushed me off to the Wedel candy factory.

"You will just have time. Our factories close at three so that people can be off the streets by dark. Some of them have to walk a long way and there are no streetcars yet. The Germans brought them to the barns and blew them all up at once. Our streetcar

workers are digging out the pieces and putting them together again."

We drove through the once great industrial region. Gigantic heaps of fantastically twisted iron and shattered brick marked places where factories had stood. The Germans had also blown up most of Wedel, the world-known candy concern which formerly sold confections in Paris and exhibited at the World's Fair in New York. They had overlooked two small shops. Some two hundred women — prewar Wedel employed ten thousand — had begun to make candies and cookies again. They made as yet very little and none of their candy was on general sale. It was bought up by the government and by social organizations for celebrations, such as the children's Christmas Party that I attended at the Lublin PPS.

I found that the factory was unexpectedly closing at two-thirty so that the workers could organize their trade-union before going home. In the simple brief meeting the speakers often raised their voices to be heard over the boom of exploding shells. The women paid little attention to this apparently routine artillery exchange. If their attention wandered at all from the speaker's prosaic explanation of trade-unions — that membership was voluntary, that the union protected their interests, "not like the Nazi labor front" — it was to the battered chair where I sat as an American guest. They were plainly curious about my presence there.

When they asked me to speak to them I posed a question: "In America we think that the worst of war is the shooting, but it seems that shelling doesn't matter here. What is the worst thing that war means in Warsaw?" I thought they would say it was the hunger, or perhaps the cold.

Then a shabby, thin-faced woman rose: "The worst is that the Germans took away our menfolk and we don't know whether they are dead or slaves in Germany and there is no one to help us with the children." Others were nodding assent.

I asked how many of them had lost their men. Nine tenths raised their hands. I feared that a storm of weeping would shake the meeting, so I changed the subject quickly and everyone began to breathe again. Later I repeated the question elsewhere, and found that it was true that 90 per cent of the men of Praga had been forcibly taken away.

This was the heavy burden under which Praga labored. All Warsaw had been caught unaware by General Bor's uprising, which began in midafternoon when most of the men were away at work. Some living in Praga were working across the river and never got back. Others living across the river were caught in Praga and never reached their families. Using the uprising as pretext, the Germans systematically surrounded city block after city block, searched all the houses and took out the able-bodied men. They shot some out of hand to terrorize the others. They took the rest to a concentration camp at Pruszkow from

which those who survived the hunger and epidemics there were forwarded to Germany. No news had come back of their fate. The people of Praga could look across the river and see, from the explosions and the smoke, that the Germans were blowing up and burning the houses there. They knew that the people over there were also being driven to death camps or as slaves to Germany.

At the emergency city hall, a former high school, Stephanie explained the Nazi strategy behind this seemingly useless cruelty. "They intend to destroy Poland's future. They blow up our factories, they take the machines and equipment. All this we might rebuild. To reproduce a skilled working class takes much longer. And that's what the Germans destroyed."

Many of the Poles in Lublin feared at this time that Warsaw could not serve as a capital for at least a decade. But this broken Praga — this fifth of Warsaw — felt and acted as a national capital. When I gave the candy workers the chance to ask questions about America, they did not ask, as had most people in Lublin, when UNRRA or the American Red Cross would send help; they asked: "When will America recognize us? What do the Poles in America think of those London Poles?"

Next on my program was a proud event. The "New Warsaw Symphony Orchestra," gathered together from musicians scattered by five years of war, was holding its first concert at four o'clock at the city hall

in honor of the visit of Vincente Rzmowski, chief of the "culture resort."

Forty musicians sat on the stage in the assembly hall, middle-aged men and younger women wearing overcoats or sheepskins against the penetrating cold. Four rough gray telephone poles crisscrossed above them prevented the bomb-weakened walls from collapsing. Daylight was failing and the electric light was not working that evening. The audience was small, chiefly municipal employees and a few special guests, for at this hour most citizens were hurrying home or preparing in semidarkness the last meal of the day.

Never have I heard Chopin's "Polonaise" played as I heard it there. I never really knew the meaning of that word "Polonaise" before. Then as dark came on, until we couldn't see faces any more but only blurred forms against the pale windows, that old Polish greeting "*Sto lat! Sto lat!*" — may you live a hundred years and again and again a hundred — thundered out toward the stooped-shouldered, white-haired man with the baton who for the moment symbolized Polish national culture. Only afterwards did I learn that the score of the "Polonaise" and of the selections from the Polish national opera *Halka* had been written from memory by the director-conductor. There was no sheet music to be found in Poland.

"I did my best," the fanatically devoted man told me, "but I can't remember every note. Some of the accompaniment is probably my own composition." He

added incidentally that he had had to change the program just five minutes before starting because an important instrument was in a house shelled that afternoon.

Still later, and still more incidentally, I learned that Colonel Marion Spychalski, mayor of Warsaw-Praga, who had promised me an interview after the concert, had left the hall during the performance to organize the rescue of the people buried under the ruined house. He personally lifted timbers and helped pull out a man's dead body, four women uninjured except for shock, and a baby in perfect condition. When I met him two hours later at the banquet given by the Warsaw branch of the Democratic Party, neither his well-brushed uniform nor his lively manner betrayed his recent activities.

We sat in a tastefully appointed room adorned by beautiful paintings, the home of a member of the Democratic Party put at the organization's disposal to honor Vincente Rzmowski, also one of the members of that party. We enjoyed an exquisite repast, every course of which was chosen with sophistication. We toasted everybody in Poland and in the United Nations and gave to all *Sto lat! Sto lat!* — a hundred, hundred years. With especial warmth the guests gave three different toasts to America: to President Roosevelt, to "one of the world's oldest democracies," and to me personally as the first American who had come.

A young woman, leaning towards me, challenged: "You'll never be able to tell of our life in Poland!

When you write it, it's not the same. I read an article about our underground and thought: 'It didn't really seem like that.' The risks and tragedy that the article told were real enough. But it couldn't tell how gay we were in defiance, what a kick we got from outwitting those Nazi beasts."

It was eleven o'clock when Spychalski finally led Stephanie and me to the cellar room in the City Hall which he shared with his adjutant, and said with resignation: "Now start that interview." I took down a few words about how when the Red Army came in the people came out of the cellars and began to look for food, and how they cleaned old artesian wells and made emergency electric-power connections, because these utilities normally came from the other side of the river. The interview stopped right there because the Lord Mayor was dozing off in his chair while four worthy citizens waited in a corner to give him some more work.

So I asked Stephanie – it was the first time all day there had been time for it – where I was to sleep that night. The room to which she led me was in the same cellar but not nearly as snug as Spychalski's. His had been somewhat warmed by a stove and a succession of visitors, but my room offered only a newly washed cement floor, still damp, and cold, stiff sheets on an iron cot. I shivered in this underground cell. Stephanie invited me to her second-floor quarters to warm up before going to bed; when I saw her tiny room with its cot, table, and two chairs, I shamelessly cov-

eted the Holland stove whose cooling tiles still slightly warmed the air.

"Can't we move my bed up here?" I ventured. Stephanie seemed pleased by my choice, but felt it her duty to explain that cellar rooms were safer for honored visitors in view of the almost nightly shelling.

"Rheumatism is certain in that cellar," I rejoined, "while German shells are only a chance." A slim chance at that, I judged, since Stephanie had survived three months on the second floor with the loss of only one windowpane. We brought up my bed, which just filled the remaining space. Stephanie remarked — I filed it for reference — "Whenever you come to Warsaw, this is your bed."

So it was Stephanie who told me how the Polish First fought its way to Praga and how the ruined city came to life. We talked through the night by the light of a single candle on the table between us, waiting for the German shells to fall. Stephanie had come with the army all the way. She had taken part in two river crossings, the forcing of the Bug into Poland, and the still more dramatic forcing of the Vistula at Pulawy.

"There are different ways of forcing a river — by artillery or by surprise. We forced the Bug by artillery; my detachment came afterwards with little fighting to do. At Pulawy we threw troops over secretly at night. The enemy saw us at dawn and the battle for the Vistula began. We had primitive rafts of all kinds — barn doors with barrels under them. Enemy

machine-gunning is bad when you're on water, just standing on a board with no place to go.

"I was on the east shore sending boats over and receiving them back. All the artillery hit square at us there. We dug in about six yards from the shore; for a time we could move neither forward nor back. Men fell all around me and it was impossible to send the wounded away. So I rolled up my uniform sleeves and began to look after them. We held and extended the bridgehead. But we lost many men in those five days."

The Dombrowski Division, in which Stephanie fought, was then withdrawn from Pulawy and sent into Praga. "We did not fight in the taking of Praga; we came in as second line on the fourth day. All the way we could see the signs of the fierce fighting. I saw ten Red Army tanks piled up around a single enemy pillbox. You know what those pillboxes were — practically all underground. To the tank driver it seems that only a single soldier opposes him. But underground is a whole fort supplied with food and an artesian well and plenty of munitions and antitank guns turning on a swivel. Those things were all over the approaches to Warsaw. They were murderous.

"The uprising was still going on across the river. We threw men over to help. But Bor's Home Army wouldn't even tell us where they were. They withdrew from contact. We lost many men in futile battles." When I pressed for details she referred me to General Korczyk. "He knows; he was sending them over. I my-

self was transferred at that time to civilian work under Spychalski."

Stephanie, I learned, was a Warsaw patriot. When she came into Praga, she threw herself at once into the mass meetings that the army's political workers were holding for the citizens. "We held them all over the city. I went to forty-five meetings in the first ten days. People came by thousands, assembling even under fire.

"The enemy was still close on the north, and the shooting was very much worse than now. Even to cross a main street you had to wait for a lull. But if you sent two soldiers to any part of town and announced a meeting, the people came even with children to hear. For five years they had known nothing of what went on in the world. They had only confused underground propaganda; they heard contradictory things about the Red Army and our new Polish Army. They came to hear what our Polish Army was fighting for. Then all over the city was one great weeping and singing the national anthem.

"My job in those meetings was to set up citizens' committees."

"How? By election?" I asked.

Stephanie laughed. "How can you elect when shooting goes on and houses fall and people flee from block to block? You dodge across streets and you hunt up active citizens and the ones that are willing to work. You get them to clearing streets and pulling folks from under fallen houses and cleaning wells. You

start with half a dozen members and then you get a chairman and a vice-chairman. Then more people join and you begin to divide into sections: sanitation, provisioning, water, schools, relief. Then food comes from Lublin for you to distribute and so your citizens' committees have power! Later the City Hall appoints food distributors, and your citizens' committees have a new function; they criticize and report.

"For instance, in one ward the bread wasn't tasty. The committee went to learn why. They found that the baker was sifting the flour and selling the finest part on the black market, keeping the coarser part for the rationed bread. They raised a row, and the city food administration got another baker."

She was telling how community life grows out of chaos. So I pressed her to go on. "Well, the ward committees find that they can't keep track of everything, of the houses that fall, and the people that arrive, and the refugees to be fed. So they start house committees and block committees. Now at last we have time to elect. The house and block committees are elected by the tenants. Life is settling into form.

"The biggest single job of our house committees was getting in the winter potato supply. Our central authorities in Lublin gave Praga the right to collect a certain amount of potatoes as part of the general food levy. The peasants were willing to give but not to transport; they said they had no horses. We called on our house committees to dig up the best go-getters in town. We sent out fifty – the kind that would walk

fifteen miles on the chance of finding a horse. When they got the potatoes to depots, Spychalski had army trucks bring them in."

So Stephanie came to her job as right-hand woman for Warsaw's mayor. Her admiration for Spychalski dates back to prewar days when he was an architect-engineer in the city-planning department, and she was a factory worker, active in civic affairs. "Spychalski also helped plan Poznań," she told me, "but Warsaw is his own home town. He knows and loves every stone and corner. It stabs him almost physically to see across the river how the Germans blow those fine buildings up."

It was clear that she was growing sleepy. Under my prodding she produced a few last facts. The house committees had drawn up the draft lists for army mobilization. They hunted up buildings for schools. At the moment they had launched a "Christmas gifts for soldiers" campaign, visiting every tenant. "If they can't give big things like scarves or mittens, maybe they can give paper for soldiers to write letters home." . . . Yes, it was really a community growing from chaos.

Stephanie sensed something of what I felt for she said drowsily, half asleep as the candle guttered out: "All these sections and committees grew up in a month. We have two thousand house committees now in Praga. When you are fighting over them you don't think you are getting anywhere, but when you sum

it up like this, you see how much it is. Maybe it's a good thing you came to Praga to make me list what we have done."

It was after two when we went to sleep, but Stephanie aroused me before it was light. Praga lived from seven in the morning till three in the afternoon. Frost had fallen in the night; there was thick ice in the yard. By the time we had finished bread and coffee — my powdered Washington flavoring my hostess's ersatz — the City Hall was crowded with shivering, shabby, but determined citizens. The municipal officials were receiving them at plain deal tables, a dozen such "bureaus" in each large room.

A windowpane fell into a room as we entered, shaken loose by the shelling of that house the day before. The city auditor moved his chair from the draft, shivered, and continued work. The woman in charge of kindergartens investigated the chances of pasting over the hole. Two women at the food-rationing table, stacking up food cards in four colors, looked at the broken window and bragged: "We got all the potatoes for school lunches and teachers' rations distributed yesterday before the frost."

Across the yard I visited a fifth grade school class assembled in the teacher's own room. Her bed had been shoved into a corner to accommodate two rows of desks with sixteen children. Behind the teacher were the blackboard, the Polish eagle, two crossed national flags, and a "Jesus of the Sacred Heart." More

than half the children had seen their fathers taken away by the Germans; one child's mother had been taken, too. They were all thrilled to know that I was from America, but since no geography had been taught under the Germans, they had little idea where America was, though one boy knew it as a "big land over the sea." They knew that America was an "ally"; one girl guessed "Churchill" as its president, but a boy said firmly "Roosevelt," which won the support of the class. They knew that Russia lay to the east, for the Red Army came from there.

A few blocks down, I called at the ward headquarters of a citizens' committee and recognized the chairman as a man I had met at the festive supper the previous evening. Vincente Cudny was no post-war upstart. A steady citizen, living for forty years in the same street in Praga, he had headed the "citizens' guard of the fourteenth ward" in the first World War under the Russian Tsar. He was the natural neighborhood choice for chairman of a committee which included an engineer, a doctor, a professor, four industrial workers, and several women among its ten members.

Cudny's committee ran a food kitchen supplying three thousand meals daily; it had distributed tens of thousands of pounds of dry products. "Our hardest job is finding rooms for bombed-out families," sighed Cudny. "We've done fairly well. We rehoused thirteen hundred families in this ward in two months." He climbed into an open jeep and set off for Lublin in

zero weather on business connected with Praga's food supply.

My own jeep zigzagged down Washington Allée towards the Poniatowski Bridge, turning up one side street and down the next. I was bound for the Polish Army's front-line positions, in the ruined houses on the riverbank. "We don't stay on the main boulevard any longer than we can help," explained the young captain who was taking me around. "It points straight towards the enemy positions."

Turning to the left we parked not far from the river in the shelter of some battered houses. People of wealth and culture had lived here for the river view; this was evident from the beautiful yellow tiles scattered on the pavement and across the frost-killed garden through which we gingerly picked our way towards the shore, and from the grand piano that had toppled from a second floor into the street. Behind broken walls and shattered windows were still some livable rooms, for artillery fire is hit or miss.

Two old women came from one of the houses. The captain gave them a casual glance. "Civilians were ordered to leave the river front last September but what can you do when they stay? We aren't Germans. We chased out the young folks and the families, but these old people can't work and have no place to go. They'd rather die at home than move. When shelling is bad, they hide in cellars."

At one place we had to walk a block in the open,

sheltered only by a thin mist of leafless bushes. The captain threw his khaki-colored raincoat over my dark blue overcoat, remarking: "We're under enemy observation here. They're quiet lately and not likely to waste ammunition on stray soldiers, but your coat might make a sniper take you for a high-up officer." A couple of rifle shots ricocheted down the street in a desultory way just as we left it.

The artillery observation post was on the roof of a four-story villa. We bent low lest the enemy spot us over the shoulder-high parapet. Through a hole in the wall I looked with field glasses over the river. Except for the smoke of destruction it was hard to detect any activity. The artillery observer pointed out some debris between the first two bridge piers on the opposite shore — the bridge was gone but its end supports remained.

"That's a double machine-gun nest. Shall we send them one?"

"Sure," said I, returning the field glasses.

So we sent not one but four, and every shot was plainly visible to the naked eye. I was looking through a broken gap between bricks. The observer was looking through field glasses marked with little black lines of a scale. He made corrections into a telephone, saying words like: "Right, zero, zero, two." After he spoke we heard the rumble of a mortar far behind us — they said it was a couple of miles off — and then the faint *psh-psh* in the air high above us and then the explosion over the river as the bomb struck. The

fourth shot hit smack on the target. A cloud of fragments rose between the piers.

"Come down now," said the captain, "for the enemy will answer." He took me downstairs, but the observer stayed in his fourth-floor room because he disdained cellar air. He'd been lucky so far, though I saw that his doors and windows were patched over a score of bullet holes.

While the "enemy answered" with a rain of mortar bombs and a popping of rifles along the river, I visited dugouts and tunnels. The big earthen levee, built in peaceful days to restrain the Vistula floods, made a wartime place for machine-gun emplacements and underground quarters for the crews. Crouching low, I crept by tunnel clear through the levee to its outer face above the river, where a machine gun pointed through a small aperture at the enemy. There was nothing between me and the Germans now but the Vistula and air.

"We don't fire this in daytime lest the enemy spot it."

When the enemy fire died down we dodged our way out again, more carefully now because the Germans were alert and sent several shots more or less in our direction. In one house the captain took me upstairs on a personally conducted mountain climb over debris in the halls and smashed fixtures of a once lovely bathroom to get the best view of the full length of the famous Poniatowski Bridge. Its entire middle, blown up by the Germans the previous September,

lay, a tangled mass of iron scrap, in the river bed. Great sections jutted out from either shore. From the highest, farthest, jagged girders on our side of the river — to which it seemed only an expert structural ironworker could raise them under the calmest of conditions — floated two challenging white-red flags.

"Two of our boys went out with them the night before November 11th, our Independence Day. It was a tough job, for there's a lot of loose iron that rattles at a touch. Dawn showed them flying. The Germans have fired at them ever since, but can't bring them down."

The detachment headquarters were a few blocks back from the river in a couple of rooms whose broken windows were made weather-tight by boards. Four large gaudy oil paintings of an absent owner looked down on miscellaneous war trappings while I chatted over tea with a dozen young officers of the battalion. They were gay daredevils, indulging in pranks against the enemy while awaiting the next serious offensive.

"The Germans worry a lot about the coming offensive," one said. "They're always expecting us to start across the river. One night we made a lot of barges of straw and set them drifting towards Warsaw. The Germans sank them with fierce fire. Probably they didn't know till morning on what they had wasted their ammunition."

The funniest story was about the Miaow-101. The Germans had threatened — both sides had radio mega-

phones through which they shouted – that they would send their V-1 (pronounced Fow-1) and knock Praga off the map. The Poles replied: "Wait till you see ours!" That night they took four cats, tied bags of dried peas to their tails, and chased them over the "Poniatowski Bridge" – that is, its iron wreckage in the river. The cats and peas rattled bravely on the loose iron; the enemy shot wildly. Two cats were killed, the others got over. Then the Poles roared over the megaphone: "That's our Miaow-101!"

The oldest officer present, a colonel, had been soldiering twenty-five years. "I've fought five major wars: the first World War, the China War, the Spanish War, the Finnish War, and this one. This is my first chance to fight for my own country, Poland."

The youngest soldier present was Edmund Kopij, a kid of thirteen, whose mother was killed by a bomb and whose father enlisted, bringing his son.

"What do you do in the army?"

"Shoot," he said with pride.

"He's a messenger," explained the captain, "and a very brave one, carrying out all orders even under fire. He's a spunky imp. He hiked the whole way from the Bug to the Vistula and never once asked for a lift." He added that many such youngsters came to the army trying to join and, when there was no one else to look after them, the army took them and put them in an army school.

With dry, unwinking eyes this youngster told me his aim in life was to kill Germans to avenge his

mother. He had no idea that he was a tragic figure robbed of childhood. When I asked what he intended to be when the war was over, he replied in a shrill, childish treble just one word, "Officer!"

I had assumed that the front was stabilized, that the broad Vistula was a complete barrier to any activity except exchange of shells. A young lieutenant surprised me. "Too bad you weren't here last night. A bunch went over the river to capture a 'tongue' — an enemy seized for information."

How could men cross to the other side when searchlights flared at the slightest sound? He explained that their guide was an old fisherman with lifelong experience in noiseless night boating. The officer in charge was a Pole who had served in the German Army under compulsion and had deserted to the Poles with his German uniform and his knowledge of German routine. They crossed without incident and went stealthily along the shore until they met a German sentry. Without awaiting his challenge, the Polish officer himself barked: "Halt, *wer geht?*" Caught off guard, the sentry hesitated, giving them time to seize him and gag him with a first-aid package, which admirably fits in the mouth. On the way back to the boat they met two more Germans and had to shoot their way out. This started the searchlights playing but they managed a speedy getaway.

"Was it worth it? Did he talk?"

"Sure did! Not only to us but to the whole German Army. He told his pals over our megaphone that they

were fools to keep on fighting. We sent him to the rear later."

The boys swung the talk to America. The captain would willingly have discussed modern American literature. He knew the works of Dreiser, of Upton Sinclair, as well as more classic writers. He flattered me by recalling my own books on China. He was a well-read modernist; but the younger fellows wanted to guy me about America.

"Don't they teach geography in America? Don't Americans know where Poland is? Poland is not over there in that London fog! Poland is here, fighting on the freezing Vistula."

CHAPTER VII

Bor's Uprising

THE Warsaw uprising was launched by General Bor, commander of the Home Army, on August 1st, as the Red Army was approaching the city. It was crushed by the Germans in two months of bloody slaughter. An estimated quarter of a million people, most of them non-participating civilians, were killed. The Red Army meanwhile fought its way into Praga, the eastern section of Warsaw, and, in the sixth week of the uprising, entrenched itself along the bank of the Vistula. The Germans continued the destruction of the main city on the western shore.

All the long-accumulated frictions between the London Poles and the Russians flamed high over this tragedy. The Moscow press denounced Bor for staging an uprising without correlating it with Red Army strategy or consulting any of the Allied powers. General Zymierski, whose Polish Army was an ally to the Red Army, stated flatly that Bor deserved court-martial for "sacrificing the Polish capital and its residents in the forlorn hope of a political *coup d'état*." The London Poles countered with the charge that

the Red Army had halted its offensive right at the gates of Warsaw, delivering the city to slaughter rather than see the government-in-exile take power. They promoted General Bor, making him commander in chief of all their armies, both in Poland and abroad. A proposal to honor him also with the Virtuti Militarii Cross was prevented only by the opposition of General Lucian Zeligowski, chief of the legion of decoration bearers, who stated that in all history this cross had never been awarded for launching a losing action. Bor, meanwhile, was a prisoner of the Germans, to whom he had surrendered rather than fall into the hands of his opponents among the Poles.

The tragedy became the center of acrimonious comment even on an international scale. There was disagreement between the British and the Russians on the dropping of arms to the insurgents. The Russians held that the arms "would fall to the Germans" since the position of the insurgents was unknown. British and American planes flew long distances to drop small quantities of arms and charged that the Russians "refused to co-operate." The acrimony persisted when the Russians reached Praga and dropped large quantities of arms to the insurgents themselves. The question was asked: Why didn't they do it before? The Warsaw uprising, like so many acts of the Polish government-in-exile, was sowing suspicion among the Allies.

Some of the issues were explained at General Zymierski's press conference late in September. He

stated that General Bor's first and only request for help reached him through Mikolajczyk in Moscow in the first week of the rising and mentioned three places — the Opera, the Polytechnic, and Old Town — as held by the insurgents. "I told Mikolajczyk that it was technically impossible to drop arms to individual buildings. I proposed that Bor give us the co-ordinates of points in woods or fields west of Warsaw where weapons could be dropped in quantities. I never got any further message from Bor. No messengers of any kind reached us from the insurgents until September 12th, when two women from the People's Army managed to get across to us and gave us definite locations. We dropped arms at once and continued until informed that the space was too small to receive deliveries."

Even while we conferred in the spacious rooms of the Polish Embassy, the last events of the uprising took place. We did not know it, but General Bor had surrendered an hour before our press conference began. A few insurgents fought their way out, crossing the river to the First Polish Army with the help of Red Army artillery. Eight o'clock, the hour of our press conference, was the hour set for the covering guns to open up. The Poles were fighting their way over the river while we talked.

The controversy was still sizzling when I went to Poland. Here it was easier to establish the facts.

My friends Stephanie and Jan Wende, not to mention the lads of the First Polish in Praga, knew at

first hand how and where the Red Army fought in those disputed days. Colonel — now General — Marion Spychalski was excellent authority on the German Vistula defenses. General Wladislaw Korczyk, commanding the First Polish, knew precisely what help had been sent over the river. So much for the picture on the eastern bank.

For the tale of the uprising itself there were several officers from the insurgents, including a man named Zenon, who was coughing his life out in a Lublin tenement when I met him. Jean Forbert, a girl insurgent, fought in three different parts of town and finally escaped with the last group to cross the river. Two fascinating girls in uniform, Helene Jaworska and Janina Balcerzak, had groped through sewers under the German positions to bring the first messages to the Red Army. A well-to-do mother of Warsaw, separated from her baby by the sudden outbreak, described at length the terrible fate of noncombatants.

I thought my picture was fairly complete until, at the celebration of the land reform in the little town of Radzyn, I ran into an officer whose personality impressed me even before I knew his record. When I learned that he was Colonel Szaniawski, who — as a major — had led the perilous escape across the river, I immediately adapted my plans to a two days' stay in Radzyn for an extended interview. His was the most connected story of the rising, since he had fought for four weeks in Old Town and later commanded the

People's Army in the northern part of Warsaw at Zoliboz.

What was the general military situation in Poland on August 1st when the Warsaw uprising was launched by General Bor?

The Germans had retreated across the eastern third of Poland, which presents no natural line of defense. They were pouring westward through the streets of Warsaw, creating panic among German civilians and arousing hope among Poles. "The streets were all full of fleeing Germans," said my Warsaw mother. "Tanks with geese and chickens on top of them, cows driven along with German troops, a chaos impossible to believe about these formidable masters. The Red Army came so fast into little towns that we thought of as eastern suburbs. We expected to be free at any moment without a battle." This was the civilian expectation on which General Bor capitalized.

Military men knew other facts. They knew that the Germans had their main defense line along the Vistula — the widest water barrier between the Dnieper and Berlin. General Marion Spychalski gave me an engineer's view of these German fortifications. His past as a city planner in Warsaw made them clear in his mind.

"Warsaw-Praga was fortified as the keystone of the German defense. South of Warsaw the fortifications coincided with the Vistula. To the north they swerved eastward toward East Prussia through difficult swamps

along the Narew River. The 'Warsaw Shield' consisted of two fortified belts in the shape of a semicircle east of Praga. The outer belt ran through a series of towns as far as sixty miles away. All of these were powerful fortresses. The inner ring was locked around Praga itself. Between these two rings were numerous intermediary lines. The entire area was a maze of reinforced concrete gun emplacements, broad mine fields, barbed-wire entanglements, antitank barriers. The enemy was sparing neither of concrete nor of iron. All the defenses that our troops encountered from the Soviet border to the Vistula were child's play compared to the fortifications of the Warsaw suburbs."

For taking such heavily fortified centers, encirclement is the customary tactic rather than frontal attack. The Red Army planned to take Warsaw by a wide outflanking from the north and south. "This plan was also drawn up with a view to saving the Polish capital, its buildings and inhabitants," said General Zymierski. "It was known by the command of the Polish Army whose entire forces were concentrated on the Warsaw front."

Such a plan required considerable preparation. The Red Army's long, sustained offensive had driven two hundred and sixty miles on the southern flank and three hundred and forty on the northern. It was reaching its natural end. Railroads and bridges blown up by the Germans had to be repaired to bring up supplies. Trucks were bringing shells and gasoline

three hundred miles from the supply base, using more gasoline than the trucks could carry.

"Our offensive power was spent," stated Jan Wende who, as a Polish officer, heard the discussions that raged during those weeks. "What army in history of comparable size ever made such a tremendous drive? Everything about the army, the men, and the equipment had to stop to breathe. We might have taken Warsaw without breathing if it had been unfortified; but just as we hit those murderous fortifications, the Germans threw their fresh tank divisions in. What they did to us was plenty!"

"There were eight bridges over the Central Vistula," explained Spychalski. "Four of these were in Warsaw, three were south of the city, and one to the north at Modlin. The entire German retreat from Eastern Poland poured westward over the Warsaw bridges. This caused the Warsaw people to exaggerate the German debacle. They did not see the German reserves in the north coming over the Modlin bridge with four fresh tank divisions driving down on the Red Army's flank." The Red Army, at the end of a long offensive and with overextended communications, was pushed back. Only after difficult and bloody battles lasting for several weeks did it force its way into Praga. "We should have postponed the taking of Praga at this time and taken it later more easily and with fewer losses, had it not been for our desire to bring all possible aid to Warsaw," stated Zymierski.

* * *

BOR'S UPRISING

What was going on in Warsaw while the Red Army fought at its approaches? There was disagreement within the city about when the uprising should take place.

Colonel Leon Rawicz of the "Security Corps," an armed force affiliated with General Bor's Home Army, left Warsaw as the representative of "several hundred Polish officers" who disagreed with Bor on the time of the rising and wanted to get word to Premier Mikolajczyk, then in Moscow, to postpone it. He told of the discussion in the officers' circles. Some held that the rising should start when the Red Army was within thirty miles, others when the Red Army reached the Vistula line along its entire length, still others when the Red Army had secured bridgeheads west of the Vistula, north and south of Warsaw. All these officers took it for granted that the rising would be made in agreement with the Red Army command and with the many different Polish partisan "armies" inside Warsaw. Bor's failure to make contact with any of these possible allies was what caused the Security Corps to go over to Zymierski's new Polish Army.

On General Bor, representative of the London government-in-exile and chief of their Home Army, falls sole responsibility for the timing and method of the rising. Neither the Red Army nor the other partisan armies in Warsaw were informed in advance of the plans. The Germans apparently sensed that something was in the air, for they strengthened their guard on the Vistula bridges and began to mine them a few

hours before the rising began. Months later in Lublin people were still debating why Bor called it at this "suicidal time." Some attributed it to "orders from London," others to "the same obsolete military strategy that led to Poland's downfall in 1939"; still others suspected the presence of enemy agents in Bor's staff, not perhaps in direct control but capable of influencing the plans.

That there were some "orders from London" hardly admits of doubt. The rising synchronized with Mikolajczyk's first visit to Moscow, which he timed on his own initiative. Plenty of evidence exists on what he discussed there. Even to us correspondents he showed a lack of interest in Lublin and a hope that he would soon be in Warsaw. Spychalski, who took part in those Moscow talks, told me that the Prime Minister of the government-in-exile "was evading the Lublin Poles and demanding to be taken straight into Warsaw by the Red Army. When informed that Warsaw would be taken by encirclement, which, considering the enemy fortifications and counterattacks, would take considerable time, he turned white and was obviously quite disturbed. It was plain to us then that he wanted to be put in Warsaw with the Home Army so that he could by-pass our Lublin Committee entirely."

The rising began in midafternoon of August 1st. Different people learned of it in different ways.

"A powerful explosion took place in the heart of

the city; a bomb in the German commandant's office was the signal." This was the description given me by an engineer. To a Warsaw mother it began with "an air-raid alert." Jean Forbert, sturdy girl partisan in Wola district, knew only that "shooting in the streets began."

Major Szaniawski, commanding an underground detachment of the People's Army in Warsaw, thought little of those first shots. "Shots were rather common," he told me. He had finished work at four o'clock in the afternoon and gone home to dinner. Neither he nor any member of the People's Army had been informed of Bor's plans. "A friend came and told me there was a rising. I started at once for my post, but I could not even cross the street because of heavy German fire. After several vain efforts, we went into the cellar and cut through the walls into the adjoining apartment house. For forty-eight hours we were cutting through walls and dashing from one building to the other to reach our mustering point. Finding nobody there we went on to Old Town – Stare Miasta, the old market place not far from the river – picking up men along the way."

Jean Forbert also made her way to Old Town from the western part of the city. "When the shooting began my father and mother were two miles south of Wola at Ochota. I couldn't get to them. Then I tried to reach my detachment. I was three days dodging through the streets and crawling close to houses. There were many corpses already. Finally I reached

Old Town, got a white-red arm band and became a soldier. There was great enthusiasm at first. Home Army bulletins announced that the Red Army was crossing the Vistula and already fighting in Warsaw. But in ten days the Germans burned Ochota, bombed Wola into silence, and then came on Old Town from all sides."

A well-to-do Warsaw woman went with her husband to have tea with her parents in a big apartment house about ten minutes away. She left her two-year-old baby at home with its nurse. "We were all having tea when the 'alert' sounded. We went down from the sixth floor and found some thirty young men and boys with arm bands and pistols and one tommy gun in the lot. I don't know how they got there, perhaps they were trying to reach the bridge. But the Germans had the house already surrounded and were shooting at it from tanks.

"We stayed in that house three days. There were five hundred people, mostly women and children, for the men never got home from work. There were just those thirty fighters with hardly any ammunition. It was wonderful to see someone at last hitting back at the Germans, and yet it was terrible, for it was so clear that they couldn't succeed. On the third day came the end. There was no ammunition and the German planes were right over the roofs dropping bombs. The Germans put mines under the walls and prepared to blow us all up. Somebody raised a white flag. A woman ran out and brought back terms of

surrender. The men had to come out on one side and women and children on the other. They said the men would be shot.

"We all came out in the rain, forgetting to take coats and handbags. We could only think that our dearest were being torn away. It was heart-rending when those young fighters lay down with their faces to the pavement. One was a boy not over fourteen. He could have hidden his arm band and pistol and nobody would have taken him for a fighter. He was one of the first to lie down to die. They were all shot but I think their heroic acceptance of death saved the rest of us. The Germans had their victims. They didn't kill our civilian men. It hurts me to think those boys' mothers will never know of their heroism. All their identity papers were false."

All over Warsaw a million human beings were pitched into this inferno, innocent and unprepared. In the first days, scattered fighting went on in many parts of the city: the downtown district, the western areas of Wola and Ochota and Mokotow, and three regions nearer the river – Zoliboz in the north, Old Town in the center, and Czernyakow further south. From the first hour the Germans were able to isolate these regions from each other. By the third day they had combined tanks, planes, infantry in a systematic destruction of Warsaw. They blockaded the city, stopping food deliveries. They cut the water mains, and fired into queues waiting at the few wells. They held open squares and thoroughfares under fire from mul-

tiple-barreled mortars and heavy siege guns. Bombers circled low, dropping incendiaries and demolition bombs, wrapping the capital in flame and smoke. House after house was blown up with all its residents.

Our Warsaw mother, driven from her parents' apartment house, tried for nearly a month to reach her baby who was ten minutes away. She took refuge in cellar after cellar until each shelter had in turn been fired and its people either killed or driven on. She was always "dancing on the edge of death." Several times she saw her own apartment house from a distance but was never able to reach it.

"They drove us through a wall of fire to the National Museum. The prettiest houses in Warsaw were burning on the Third of May Allée! A detachment of Ukrainian nationalist SS stood us against a wall, saying it was time to shoot the women now. After fifteen terrible minutes we found it was just their little joke. Four thousand of us were held in the Museum cellars four days without food, water, or sanitary facilities — imagine what the cement floor was like in a couple of hours! We were 'hostages'; the Germans proclaimed that we would all be shot unless the rising stopped. When I got out alive I believed in miracles!

"The upper floors had all been burned over one cellar where I stayed three weeks. We were all starving there. Seven people were killed the first week trying to get vegetables from a garden in the yard. A six-year-old boy was shot in that garden; he was

wounded at first and lay on his back moaning. Every time he moved the German took a shot at him. We saw him die and couldn't get to him. Nobody in that cellar was fighting; we were only looking for food. When the Germans got around to it they set our cellar on fire again and drove the people over the river to the Pruszkow concentration camp as slaves. We passed through Praga in the dark and I managed to escape." In the four months since she had had no news of her baby.

At first practically everyone took it for granted that the rising had been agreed upon with the Red Army. Knowing that they themselves could not hold off the Germans, but expecting help from moment to moment, they fought with superb heroism. All the armed partisan groups in the city, of whatever political complexion, immediately joined in the fighting, handicapped as they were by lack of preparation or warning. An estimated twenty-five thousand of the Home Army and seventy-five hundred of the People's Army took part. Unarmed civilians joined in. People turned streetcars over, tore up rails, threw furniture out of the houses, and knocked over newsstands to make barricades. Girls attacked German tanks with bottles of gasoline. Small children carried messages between houses. Slowly and bitterly came the realization that there had been no co-ordination of plans with the Red Army, from which they were still separated by the strongest line of enemy fortifications in Poland.

Lack of planning seems to have marked the uprising from the beginning. Accounts differ as to whether the insurgents held any strategically important locations at any time. One engineer told me that they held for a time the telephone exchange, the power plant, the post office, and the Polytechnic Institute. Zenon, a sergeant in the People's Army, charged with rancor that "Bor took places of political rather than of military value — the city hall and the local police stations — so that he would be the government when the Red Army came." The Germans at all times held the bridges and the Warsaw citadel. There is no evidence that the Home Army even tried to cut the communications behind Warsaw by which German reinforcements were rushed. Months later in Lodz I learned that the local Home Army commander thought of going to the relief of Warsaw — his function might have been to cut communications — marched out a distance, and then came back.

Isolating the small separate groups of insurgents, the Germans wiped them out one by one. Three places held out longest: the downtown area, containing the headquarters of the Home Army; Old Town, the historic ancient market place; and the northern district, Zoliboz. I have no reports from the downtown area, none of whose fighters escaped eastward when General Bor surrendered. Graphic details of the Old Town and Zoliboz engagements were given me by participants.

When Major Szaniawski reached Old Town in the

first week of the rising, he found some thirteen hundred armed men all told, including the Home Army, the People's Army, and smaller units of the Polish Socialist Party Battalion and the Union of Young Fighters. They held an area about half a mile square inhabited by nearly one hundred and fifty thousand unarmed people. Every street was crisscrossed with barricades. Every house became in turn a fortress. Steadily the Germans tightened their encirclement, reducing Old Town house by house. The major estimates that at least fifty thousand people perished in Old Town alone.

"It was bright August weather, but you could not see the sky for smoke during the day, while night was like day because of the fires. German planes were right over the housetops strafing and bombing. One big apartment house after another toppled into the street and the cellar, burying the screaming people. When things got desperate the younger officers of the Home Army began to talk of communicating with the Red Army. We of the People's Army were long since anxious to do this, but the Home Army had the only radio. Finally their commander agreed to send a joint message asking for help. All the fighting organizations in Old Town signed it. We gave it to the Home Army commander to send. Next day I learned that it had gone not to the Red Army but to the Polish government in London in code."

"Did any of the British supplies reach you by plane?"

"They tried to help us in mid-August. Five planes dropped pistols, grenades, and antitank weapons into Old Town at night. The gesture was heartening but the quantity was small. About three nights later they came again. This time the Germans were ready for them with vicious flak. A British plane was brought down on Podwala Street in our area, killing one pilot and wounding the other so that he died in our makeshift hospital. That time most of the supplies fell to the Germans. A month later some eighty Flying Fortresses came over at four in the afternoon, flying very high, thirteen to fourteen thousand feet. The sky was full of stuff attached to parachutes but it was so high that the wind carried most of it to the Germans or across the river. I saw it from Zoliboz. We had been wiped out in Old Town!"

Old Town fell on August 28th after four weeks of fighting. Jean Forbert gave a bit of ghastly detail of the last day when "the house fell on her." Some forty persons were sheltering in the cellar when four stories came down.

"I was knocked flat. A lieutenant fell on top of me, but the timbers pushed his head into the sand so that he couldn't breathe. He moaned 'Mother, Mother' and died. He lay on me for hours, but the timber above him kept the rest of the building off. I had one hand free enough to brush away the stones and sand that kept sifting around my face. A man close by went mad and yelled that he had arms and would kill us both. I tried to tell him not to but the

dead lieutenant pressed me so that I could not talk. The man didn't shoot because he couldn't move to get his gun. Our friends dug us out ten hours later and said we must leave at once by sewer for Zoliboz."

The insurgents by this time had become specialists on Warsaw sewers; they were the only connection and means of escape. Smaller pipes were barely a yard in diameter. Here people had to crawl and drag each other along. Some "super-sewers" were seven feet high; one could walk erect in them. The chief difficulties here were the darkness, the rounded slippery bottom, and the sewage itself which was of varying swiftness and depth. Sometimes it reached the knees, sometimes the chest, sometimes it was rapid enough to sweep people off their feet in the dark. There was also danger of being lost in the underground maze. One man who escaped from Warsaw by a main sewer to the Vistula told me that just where it dipped down to the river the sewer became clogged to the roof. Knowing the outlet was near he dove through the muck into the open river.

The Germans quickly learned that the Poles were using the sewers. They heard people passing underneath manholes; then they threw down grenades or gas bombs. It will never be known how many people died in those sewers. The jamming of sewers with corpses hampered Warsaw's reconstruction after the city was freed. One big sewer in the southern part of the town was blocked by bodies of a thousand people, gassed by the Germans in trying to escape.

A dry military account of the sewer route from Old Town to Zoliboz was given me by Szaniawski. "It was about two miles to our destination. The first pipe was of medium size, somewhat more than four feet in diameter. We had to bend over to walk and the filth came up to my chin. We all had pistols and thought we would shoot ourselves if it got any worse. We came soon to a larger sewer where the going was easier. When we passed under the German posts by the Danzig railway station we had to be especially careful. Here there was a manhole where the Germans could hear splashing in the water and throw down grenades. We went in small groups so that the splashing would be less."

Jean Forbert didn't want to enter the sewer. "I was dazed from being under the house and besides I had tried that sewer before. Twelve of us had gone into it, but only six got past the manhole. The Germans threw grenades and I had to wait all night with bodies brushing me in the water, until we could signal our friends in Old Town to pull us out. I didn't want to go again but my friends just jerked me along.

"Ours was the last detachment to leave Old Town. We were about one hundred and fifty. I was the fifth in line. We held to each other at first because there were many side canals and we might get lost. At the manhole we went separately, sixty or seventy feet apart, as fast and as quietly as possible. It was forbidden to speak or to strike a light. Nobody could tell what was happening to anybody else. The first man

stopped some distance beyond the manhole and waited until the others struck against him in the dark. It was hard to keep your feet on the curved slippery bottom. You could even miss your direction except for the current. I got through all right because there was not yet much noise in the water. After about thirty had passed the Germans heard and threw grenades; this divided our group and the others went back toward the downtown section. That direction was very difficult, for the sewers were barely three feet high and they had to drag people; they took our hospital that way.

"Beyond the manhole many side sewers poured in and the water was high and the current strong. It came to my chest and to the necks of some of the shorter people, knocking them down. We held hands again here and helped each other along. At Zoliboz our own people were standing at a manhole lowering ropes to haul us out."

Zoliboz, where the last stand was made, had at the beginning of September, according to Szaniawski, some two thousand fighters of the Home Army and a small group of the People's Army. "There were of course tens of thousands of unarmed civilians all around, so I drew them in and trained them. Soon I commanded five hundred men of the People's Army. We fought side by side with the Home Army men. Good feeling grew between the men and the younger officers of both armies defending the same barricades. The senior officers of the Home Army remained cold to us.

"The Home Army waited every night for help from England. They put out signals in Wilson Square on orders radioed from the London Poles; night after night they burned their flares in vain. Their radio officer came to me often saying: 'What's the matter? They've said several times that they would come and they haven't come.'

"At first the Home Army resisted every suggestion that we contact the Red Army across the river. Finally their commander in Zoliboz, Lieutenant Colonel Zywiciel, agreed that we should send two messengers, one from each of us. The Home Army, being larger and nearer to the river, was to give the technical help for crossing. All night they took the messengers in different directions. In the morning they brought them back, saying that it was impossible to pass them through the German lines. I decided to act alone. I charted a roundabout way through the sewers and told two girls of the People's Army: 'If you can reach the Red Army within four days we may yet be saved.' They left on September 10th. Within two days we had the Red Army's answer."

The drama of the Red Army reply was burned into the mind of even this veteran fighter.

"Shortly after lunch on September 12th, a plane came over, looped twice very low, and dropped three parachutes with duplicate letters: —

Greeting to the heroic fighters of the Warsaw Uprising! Your messengers arrived. We now

know your location. Set tonight a triangle of three fires on Lelevela Square. If you have electricity you may use electric lights instead. If this is clear and agreed, set a signal at six P.M. by sewing four sheets together and placing them on a roof.

"We put our signal on one of the houses of the Fourth Colony. At six a Red Army plane came over, circled several times above our signal, and went back.

"The supply planes began coming at nine, as soon as dusk fell. More than two hundred of those little 'ducks,' slow U-2 biplanes skimming above the housetops, dropped stuff right into our hands without parachutes and went back for more. They kept on until dawn. Some swooped so low that the pilots could yell to us. One called *'Zdorovo boitsi* — good going, boys.' Another promised 'See you tomorrow.' They threw mostly food the first night. We were starving but we grumbled: 'Why don't they pass the ammunition?' The next night they dropped tommy guns, antitank weapons, hand mortars, and quantities of supplies. The Germans kept shelling the square and killed many of our men who were picking up the stuff, but the Red Army help kept on. In ten nights they dropped more than a thousand tommy guns, three hundred antitank guns, two hundred and fifty hand mortars, and the necessary ammunition.

"Two radiomen from Rokossovsky's staff were also dropped for liaison. Two others from the First Polish Army managed to get through by the river. They

were quartered with the staff of the Home Army and radioed our needs to the Red Army. We got the artillery support we asked for. Red Army planes also cleared the sky of German aircraft. A battalion of the Polish First even crossed the river to help us. They succeeded in taking a narrow strip near Marymont, outside the levee. I only learned of it on the third day, for the Home Army was on that side of Zoliboz and beyond them a line of German posts. I immediately urged the Home Army commander to make contact with the First Polish. He replied that Rokossovsky radioed not to move. I did not believe him, but I could not ask the radioman, whom he kept almost like a prisoner. Two days later from a high observation post in Marymont I saw the Germans turn artillery against that narrow strip held by the First Polish and destroy them all."

After smashing the First Polish battalion, the Germans came from all directions on the Zoliboz insurgents. From north, west, and south they attacked with artillery, tanks, and infantry, driving the defenders eastward toward the German machine-gun posts between them and the river. "We fought all day of the twenty-eighth and lost about half of our men. We held on the north and west but the enemy broke in from the south, driving along Mickewicz Street to cut us in two. We had no longer even space to set out signals for Red Army planes. Everyone knew that we had come to the end."

That night the two commands met together.

Zywiciel of the Home Army proposed "to fight from house to house until the end." Szaniawski opposed this as useless suicide, saying, "We needn't die to the last man. We can cross the river to the First Polish Army." The younger Home Army officers supported him. The Red Army, when asked for help, replied with the details of its proposed support with artillery and boats.

In the swift playing out of the drama's last act the conflicting purposes of the two commanders became sharp and clear. According to Szaniawski, the crossing was fixed first at 9.20 on the morning of September 30th. "At 10.30 I asked Zywiciel why it was not taking place. He replied that strong winds made impossible the necessary smoke screen and that it was postponed to 8 P.M. At 7 o'clock Colonel Wachnowski of the Home Army's staff appeared in Zoliboz with an order to surrender. Sergeant Zenon of the People's Army asked him how he got there. The colonel first said that he drove over, but then caught himself and said that he came through the sewer. However, he looked spick-and-span. After a short talk with us he went off in the direction of the German positions and soon returned; it was plain that he had gone to consult the Germans.

"Zywiciel called together all the commanders and read the order to surrender. All the younger officers protested. Some even wept, saying: 'We've agreed with the First Polish, let's go.' To this Zywiciel replied that the Germans had broken our code and had

set up such strong opposition — tanks, barbed wire, mines, machine guns — that 'not even a mouse could get over, let alone a man.' This convinced them. Even I believed him — that perhaps not a man could get through. But we of the People's Army were doomed anyway, for the Home Army's terms of surrender got prisoner-of-war status only for their own men, leaving us to be slaughtered as outlaws. Death either way was probable. So I brought no pressure on my men; I told them that I myself would try to cross the river. Forty-eight decided to go with me.

"The Red Army artillery began at eight punctually. Zywiciel hurried to me and said: 'Give back the radioman to wire Praga to stop the artillery.' Then I exulted, for I knew now the Germans hadn't broken the code or they wouldn't need our radioman. We still had a chance then. I told him: 'Tell your German friends to send the word.' We went down Digasienskiego Street towards the river.

"For an hour the Red Army artillery pounded the German positions between us and the Vistula. Then the fire divided, making a corridor, and we went through. There were just two enemy machine guns that hadn't been silenced; they opened on us from a hundred feet; they got twenty men before we put them out of commission. They wounded a kid of thirteen who attached himself to our forces; he grabbed my hand crying: 'Daddy, don't let go!' I helped him along to the river. He's in our Polish Army now.

"We reached the river ahead of schedule. The boats

weren't there. We found a leaky canoe and put a girl in it to hold our things; then four of us swam over, pushing the canoe. On the other side we met soldiers bringing boats. I told them where to go; in an hour they brought everybody over. Forty-eight men left Zoliboz with me; only twenty-eight got through. But we could have brought the whole three thousand we planned — fifteen hundred fighters and fifteen hundred civilians — with the loss of that same twenty."

Jean Forbert was one of the four that swam the river. She supplies the detail that she reached the other shore "dead beat in nothing but a wet chemise." Excitement kept her awake while they took her all night from one staff headquarters to another — "just wrapped in a big army coat while that chemise was drying, but they gave me things everywhere till I had a full uniform" — to tell about the uprising and its fate.

General Wladislaw Korczyk, some ten weeks later in Praga, summed up for me the passionate and bitter interest that the officers and men of the First Polish showed in Jean's account that night. For weeks they tried to help their fellow Poles across the river. He claimed they were prevented chiefly by General Bor's aloofness. "From first to last he avoided contact with us."

I went to Korczyk at Stephanie's suggestion for an account of the attempts made by the First Polish to help the Poles on the other shore. No signposts led to his quarters. They were only a mile or so from the

front-line positions. I found them through a phone call by Spychalski, which directed me to a mud road and a waiting Polish officer and at last to a bunch of small, dilapidated cottages. Inside, in a comfortable, efficiently arranged staff office sat a solid man with two stars, a zigzag ribbon, and a chestful of decorations. He had come all the way with the Polish First and was preparing the final drive to free Warsaw and set the Polish standard in Berlin.

"When the Warsaw uprising broke out we were forty-five miles south of the city and on the opposite shore, with the German fortifications between. General Bor made no attempt to inform us either before or afterwards. As we fought our way into Praga, all that we could tell from observation posts was that there was fighting in a few small, scattered points on the opposite bank. We couldn't tell where were the Germans and where the Poles. Only when those two girls from Szaniawski got through to us did we know the positions. They brought word not only about Zoliboz but about the central downtown area, which communicated with Zoliboz through sewers. At once we dropped supplies to both places and liaison men to Zoliboz with full radio equipment. They were ordered to contact all insurgent forces, whether of the Home Army or the People's Army, and communicate their needs.

"We fulfilled requests when sent. They said: 'Send artillery' and we sent it. They said: 'Repeat, or send it more to the left' and we fulfilled their desire. Yet

not once did they tell us their plans or even who was sending the instructions. They expected to give orders to the Red Army without telling us who gave the orders. We did not even know whether Bor himself was in Warsaw until the Germans announced him as their prisoner."

"How could you know the requests came from Poles and not from Germans?"

"Easily enough. Our radiomen were with Bor's officers in Zoliboz. They told the requests from the center of the city. They never told the names of their commanders or what they intended.

"We made many attempts to cross the river to help the insurgents. From a military standpoint these attempts were foolish; the conditions were incredibly bad. But we could not leave Poles fighting Germans alone. Despite the bad conditions we might have enabled the insurgents to hold some areas if we could have attained joint action. All these attempts failed because Bor's men avoided contact."

I asked for examples. He gave them. "We made a landing at Czernyakow. We found there about one hundred and fifty Home Army men under a Colonel Radoslaw. They were hungry and without ammunition. We supplied their needs. Two days later without telling us, the colonel withdrew his men at night by sewer to another district. The military results of his desertion were not serious but it showed his attitude. In the central area some of our forces actually succeeded in breaking through to the downtown dis-

trict. We never heard of them again. Several times we tried to fight our way to areas held by the insurgents. They never tried to fight towards us. Often it seemed to us that they were withdrawing, but the clearest case is the one I gave.

"What a waste of life there was in Warsaw," the general concluded. "Pistols against tanks. Young boys heroically offered their lives and were thrown away when they might have been beating the Germans with us. And a city of more than a million broken and scattered."

"That's what I call high treason," judged a young Polish officer in the river-front positions. "To call a rising without correlation with one's allies, to throw a million defenseless civilians into it, to wreck Poland's capital, to surrender men and supplies which might have reached other Polish forces over the river, and to surrender on terms that doomed the men of the People's Army — loyally fighting alongside the Home Army — to outlaws' death."

We looked across the Vistula where the smoke was still heavy over the city which the Germans — using the rising as pretext — had for three months systematically destroyed. I cannot hope to reproduce the bitter contempt with which he added: "And for that the London Poles made Bor their commander in chief!"

CHAPTER VIII

Land Reform

"IN the name of the Rada Narodowa – the National Council of Poland – and in conformity with the decisions of the Peasants' Commission of Radzyn County, I tender you this title deed to land."

A scattering of applause came from more than a thousand farm men and women huddled in sheepskins and heavy shawls under the bomb-smashed windows of the hall. Some of the faces were rapt, some wistful, some grinning, but most of them looked solemn as if in church. Their eyes were fixed on the tall man in padded winter overcoat who bent forward from the cluster of Polish flags on the stage, extending with outstretched hand a square of white paper. A stocky, middle-aged peasant in sheepskin jacket was worming his way through the audience to receive it.

Vice-Minister of Agriculture Bienick's manner in handing over the title deed combined the simplicity of a dirt farmer with the assurance of a county judge. From a certain deep seriousness it was clear that he felt himself a bearer of history. If the gesture of his

roughened hand hinted also at Father Christmas, this may have been due to the scenery behind him, where a backdrop showed a large snowbound cottage at dusk among the evergreens. It was the only stage-set in Radzyn and served for both the Christmas party and the "land reform" celebration.

This was the final act in the great drama that for months had centered the attention of rural Poland. The Committee of National Liberation considered the land reform its brightest achievement. Its spokesmen reiterated in every meeting the claim that at last they were accomplishing the reform which previous governments for twenty-five years had promised and failed to carry through. A land-reform law of a mild nature had been passed in 1919. Its enforcement had been sabotaged by the landed gentry who controlled the Polish Government. The Committee was putting through a much more drastic law in the midst of war.

It was called "land reform." It might as well have been called the agricultural revolution. There were no lynchings of landlords, no burnings of manors, such as accompanied agricultural revolutions in Western Europe. The change was practically bloodless in Poland, done by government decree. For all that it was revolution, confiscation of property without payment, the overthrow of a feudal class which had dominated Polish politics since the Middle Ages.

My own first sight of the feudal land conditions of Eastern Europe dates from 1921. On behalf of the American Friends' Service I visited a village in what

was then Eastern Poland. Ragged, half-starved peasants lived in dirt-floored hovels on the edge of a swamp. Practically every inhabitant shook with malaria. The Friends' Service was pouring in quinine. It was clear that no real help was possible, short of clearing the swamp or removing the peasants.

Behind the village rose healthy wooded slopes — the landlord's estate of thousands of acres. Its owner lived in Paris, coming here for a few weeks' winter hunting with his friends. There was no way for the peasants to move to that healthy land; if they so much as entered its woods for berries or mushrooms, the foresters set dogs on them.

A youth with ragged hair and tanned face who came to Lublin for a short course on land reform described the estate near his home town, Lancut, where "Graf Potocki entertained Goering before the war."

"In Lancut itself there are only small huts," said this young Kowalczyk, "but further out a fine highway leads to the Graf's palace, thirty-seven rooms in a big park and all just for one man. The Graf had seven estates, nearly all the land around Lancut. When they knew that the Red Army was coming, the Germans sent eight trucks to help the Graf take away his fine rugs, pictures, and antique furniture. German soldiers were carrying them out of his palace for two days. Then a big passenger car came to take the Graf himself.

"The people hid, fearing the Germans would drive

them west. After the Germans were gone we came out and made a triumphal arch for the Red Army. We set up our council and opened a high school. A peaceful life began. At first the peasants were afraid to take Graf Potocki's lands. The Graf sent a messenger through the German lines to his overseers to threaten us; but workers came from the Stalewawola Steel Works and held a big meeting, and next day we took surveyors and began to divide the land. Afterwards we held the celebration at the big palace. It is now a museum of the Polish people."

Everyone knew that a change in the feudal land relationships was needed. In Poland there was also an international reason for this change. For twenty-five years the border dispute between Poland and the USSR had been complicated by feudal land rights. In the Versailles Treaty discussions a committee under the British Lord Curzon recommended a border on an ethnographic basis — since known as the Curzon Line. East of this line most of the population was White Russian and Ukrainian, but the feudal lords were Poles. In 1920 the landlords instigated war with Soviet Russia and seized by force the area which the Versailles Committee denied them. They were still promoting border controversy in 1944. Hence the first step not only to a democratic Poland but to a Poland that could live peacefully with the USSR was to break their feudal power.

Two thirds of the land in prewar Poland was owned by landlords, according to Edward Bertold, chief of

the land reform. The great families were of course relatively few, but they were the political leaders of a much larger number of landed gentry whose smaller estates conveyed a similar, if lesser, feudal status. Farms of one hundred and twenty-five acres or more were considered "estates" under the law, subject to parcellation. Under Polish conditions a farm of that size was commonly worked by many families of hereditary farm hands.

"The aim of the land reform," said Bertold once when I pinned him down for ten minutes, "is to give every farming family at least twelve acres. This may not seem much to you Americans, but only a third of our farming families have had as much as this. We want them to have land enough to support a family, to have it in one piece, and to get machines and selected seed through co-operatives and government credits. Local co-operative food-processing plants will increase year-round employment in rural areas. Beyond that, any improvement in living conditions depends on developing Poland's industries."

The land division was done under triple control: county agents appointed by the government, peasant commissions elected by the villages, and workers' brigades who volunteered from the city to help speed the work.

On a crisp December morning I drove by auto truck to the Podzamcze estate, some thirty miles from Lublin.

We reached the township center by a decent highway. Here we picked up the *vuyt* or township chief, who guided us over roads axle-deep in mud. Skidding heavily and often, with engine laboring and radiator boiling, we reached a large untidy cluster of houses and stopped by an overgrown building which had served as offices and living quarters for a managerial staff. Families overflowing from the other houses marked them as quarters of farm hands who labored on the estate.

Two thousand acres had belonged to an aged man who died during the war, leaving a young widow. She did not live on the estate and seldom visited it. She lived in Lublin where she owned two apartment houses. Half of the landed property was forest; this had been taken by the government. One thousand acres remained to be divided among the fifty-seven farm hands who formerly worked it and among the needy peasants of three near-by villages.

A group of nine men clustered around a table in an upstairs room. Two had been elected from each village and two by the farm hands of the estate. The ninth, the chairman, was appointed by the county land agent. These formed the commission to divide the land.

I found them checking a list of some two hundred applicants. Every applicant was being thoroughly discussed. The commission had been sitting for a week and seemed likely to continue indefinitely. The land was already surveyed; this technical task was rela-

tively easy. The ticklish job was to decide what peasants should get the land.

An aged man has applied. He formerly possessed twenty acres; he sold them and drank up the proceeds and is landless now. Does he get any more? Certainly not! But what of his innocent land-hungry family? Or the minor son in the Polish Army?

The father of four grown sons puts in a claim. He has only one acre; but once he owned twenty-five, and divided them among his sons. By custom the old man had to give land to his sons when they married; but three of the lads are farming the land jointly and living in the old man's home! Has he really been impoverished?

A capable young peasant claims that he possesses only three acres. His neighbor states that the young fellow's bride brought a dowry — twelve acres in a near-by county.

"You can check it with the township where she comes from," says the township official accompanying me.

"My God!" exclaims the chairman. "I need help!"

The process seems incredibly complicated. Impermanent at that! In a dozen years these families and farms will change through births, deaths, marriages.

"I shall be a free man now," exclaims a middle-aged farm hand with shining eyes. "All my life I worked for food and wages. Now I shall work for myself."

Despite complicated individual conditions, a sub-

stantial listing of families has resulted from the week's debates. Stanislaw, a farm hand with five children, gets eight acres. Janowski, with only two dependents, gets eight, because his son is a volunteer in the army. Wiernicki gets twelve acres, because of his family of eight. There's quite a long list but it is all tentative. They are all promised "more if there should be enough."

The reason for the delay and indecision, I discover, lies in a conflict between the villagers and the farm hands of the estate.

"Our fathers and grandfathers worked this land," declare the farm hands — they are clearly survivors of a feudal past rather than hired hands in the modern sense. "We want our twelve full acres before any land goes elsewhere." The villagers retort that this will leave nothing at all for equally needy peasants.

A man with dark hair and Jewish cast of face bends restlessly over the chairman. He wears city clothes. He is a mechanic from Lublin, chief of the "workers' brigade." He has no vote on the commission, no legal authority to decide anything; but his reputation with his trade-union depends on how many estates he can "finish." He is prodding, arguing. "You'll never get done at this rate. You'll be last in Lublin province."

He shoots annoyed glances in my direction. I am clearly interrupting the land reform, for every time I whisper a question everybody stops to answer. The first American ever seen in the township competes

as attraction even with the land reform. I prepare to leave with apologies. Then the restless mechanic turns suddenly friendly, eyeing me speculatively, as if with a new idea.

The township chief insists on inviting me to dinner in his town. We gather in a tiny café by the light of two tallow candles — the power plant was blown up in the German retreat. Bottles of beer and wine are opened; the hostess finds some sugared crullers to satisfy my love of sweets. Among the guests is a Russian, military commandant of the township. He asks how the land reform is going at Podzamcze and I tell about the debate.

"Those farm hands are a bit grasping," he remarks with concern. "I'd like to give them a talk — I'm a peasant from Siberia — but I'm not supposed to interfere."

Just before we left for Lublin the dark-haired mechanic came in with triumph in his eye. Everybody began to congratulate me, much to my surprise. "It was your coming that did it. It's practically finished now. The farm hands and peasants have reached a compromise. They say that if people come all the way from America to see the land reform, we must do it equally and in a friendly way."

"That was clever of you," I said to the mechanic, for I recalled his speculative look.

"Oh, no," he disclaimed. "The farm hands thought of it themselves." I let it go at that. It was better for the farm hands to think they had thought of it.

He was an even cleverer politician than I had supposed.

All this complicated labor at Podzamcze was only one small step in the land reform. It was preceded by an inventory of property, and at least a rough land survey. Afterwards came a checking of lists through the county and provincial land departments. Throughout the process every kind of peasant congress was held to organize mutual aid societies and co-operatives for the indivisible properties, the big barns, the flour mills, the tractors of the estate.

In the provincial land office on a side street in Lublin I listen to the checking of a long queue of complaints. It is very informal; they are all on top of each other. The secretary disposes of an amazing number of people in an hour.

A slow-moving woman in brown kerchief bows to the official and explains that she didn't get on the list because she was visiting her sister in another village when the applications were made. She is a widow and her two sons are slaves in Germany; she owns only two acres of land. The provincial land agent gives her a letter asking the village to reconsider her case.

A solid-looking man asks for land. He is refused, as a chauffeur in a city job just wanting a bit of extra property. Now if he were an artisan in a village, he might have a claim. Not so big a claim as a peasant but perhaps five acres for part-time farm work.

A county land agent hurries in, wanting a "power-

ful paper" to depose the overseer of an estate. The man drinks and is squandering the livestock. "We have a good, sober partisan to recommend for the post."

"But this is a job for the county. Why bring it to us?"

"They don't recognize our orders. We want higher orders." The provincial agent grunts and countersigns the county agent's paper.

A delegation of six has come from Sedlice. They have finished the land division, but there was very little land. Not over seven acres per family. Poor soil at that and the farms so small!

"Well, what can I do? Create more land? . . . If we get Pomerania now . . ."

Some provinces published special newspapers devoted to the land reform. The *Land Reform Bulletin* of Rzeczow province was especially well edited. Technical instructions were mingled with farmers' letters and political exhortation. "How to divide the land" was explained in simple language. The peasants must first take it up with the county representative. They should organize their committee, "seven to eleven citizens, honest and knowing the land . . . democratically chosen and reporting to the village."

Equally simple and clear were the "instructions to committees." They must inventory the estate and guard against looting. Measuring should be done by a surveyor; if there is no surveyor then by farmers

or farm hands familiar with such work. Parcels must be laid out not only accurately and justly but with regard to good farming and the location of roads. Applicants whose sons are not in the army should send them to the nearest draft point. "Who is not willing to fight for Polish land has no right to it." The instructions conclude: "When the entire village recognizes that the division is just, the parceling should at once proceed."

This little bulletin was already promoting a new sense of property. Yesterday the land and the livestock belonged to the landlord. Today, if he as much as sneaks a chicken away to a friend, he may be denounced in the bulletin as a thief. "The lords are squandering the peasants' property! The police will surely look into this! . . . The lady of the manor Slocinie has given away livestock to her dependents . . . The landlord Guminski is carrying away livestock . . . The lady of Zalesu has given away thirteen head of cattle . . . Peasants! Can't you find that livestock?"

A picture of the land reform in different districts was easily gained by going to peasant congresses in Lublin and talking in the intermissions to the delegates. Some congresses were on a county scale, some provincial, some national. Some came to organize cooperatives, others to discuss forms of ownership for the big barns and flour mills. One middle-aged peasant from Lomazy township, owner of a twelve-acre farm, told me that there was no land reform where

he came from, there being no estates there to divide. "I'm just here to report to our peasants about these new measures. I'm an old member of the Peasants' Party for fifteen years."

Bad management and the world-wide agricultural crisis caused many feudal owners to lose estates even before the war. The Germans had taken over others. A grizzled old man from Serniki township told of the three estates in his township. One was under tenant management; the others, bankrupt fifteen years ago, were administered by a receiver. The Germans appointed new managers, but these had fled. There were no owners to oppose the land reform in this township. Similarly in Szytnik township, according to its youthful delegate, one estate went bankrupt before the war and was under a receiver. The other two had been seized by the Germans and their owners sent to concentration camps, "because they wouldn't take the Germans' orders."

"Many of your farms seem to go bankrupt. Will the peasants handle them better?" I asked.

With typical peasant caution the young farmer replied: "On the whole they will manage better. But the land is in bad shape. It has been for a long time without manure or fertilizer of any kind." None of the peasants saw the land reform as a cure-all. It was a chance to begin.

The comprehensive and bitter story of a township in the Zamosc district was given me by an intelligent middle-aged man named Struzik, the mayor of Skier-

bieszow township. He sought me out because he wanted to pay tribute to President Roosevelt and to tell me that he liked Cordell Hull's radio speeches. The deep lines in his face and the sincerity of his manner made him an appealing figure. But how was this man of the backwoods so well informed? I learned that under the occupation he had done the dangerous work of "radio-listening," a task which he inherited from his son.

"My son was an educated boy, who understood English broadcasts," he said, with sad pride. "The Germans got him and tortured him to death. I felt that I must carry on his work. I could not do as well as he, for I understood no language but Polish. I listened to Polish broadcasts from London and from Moscow. All the underground organizations of all parties got their news from me. That was why they all combined on me for mayor now."

Zamosc district lies on the edge of the black earth area and is thus especially desirable land. Some German colonists settled there when it belonged to tsarist Russia. This gave the new German invaders an excuse to declare the area a "historic German outpost" and to decree the exile of all Poles.

"They rounded up villagers for deportation in 1940, quite early in the occupation. The huskiest were taken to Germany to work; the rest were just wiped out in death camps. German colonists were brought from Rumania, Bessarabia, Jugoslavia. If they found any Poles left in the villages, they killed

them when they came. Only those were saved who escaped to the woods. For of course when one village was deported, the near-by villages took to the woods and hid. Of sixteen villages in my township four, including mine, were deep in woods. Here the Germans could not go so easily because of our partisans. We saved here some of the people from other villages; they are going home now but they are mostly old folks and children. For nearly five years the fighting went on in the woods of the Zamosc area. The best of our young folks are no more."

There had been six estates in the township. The largest was two thousand acres; its owner had been expelled by the Germans and his son killed as a partisan, leaving no member of the family in the area. The next largest, a place of eighteen hundred acres, included considerable timber, a sawmill, a distillery, a briquette kiln, and fisheries. The owner had continued as administrator under the Germans. He was now in jail, while his family had moved to Lublin. Of the remaining owners, one had been deported by the Germans, one had co-operated with them and fled with them, one was on his property at the time of the land reform. "He gave no trouble; he left and now works as forest administrator for a township fifteen miles away."

The smallest "estate," a farm of only one hundred and fifty acres, presented an interesting problem. Its owner, a Pole, had lived in America and had come back to Poland to buy land with the money earned

overseas. The Germans drove him out but he hid in the villages. He now claimed his land on the ground that the land reform applied only to "feudal heritage" and not to farms bought "with a man's own savings." Mayor Struzik thought there was something in the argument. The peasants' commission had decided that the returned American couldn't farm so much by himself since he was sixty years old with no son and only a daughter. They left him his home and fifteen acres, somewhat more than a peasant share.

The mayor himself farmed seven acres. He had not asked for more. "What should I do with it? I have only my wife and eighteen-year-old daughter. I am sending her away to school. All able young folks should study because the Germans wiped out the educated ones and we need someone to have the rule in Poland. So if any young people want to study I help them through the township funds."

"Are the people satisfied with the land division?"

"They are satisfied that the land is divided, but they are not satisfied with the amount of the land. In Zamosc the new farms are only seven or eight acres, not enough for a family to live on. We must really get those lands in East Prussia and in the west."

He kissed my hand gallantly in the old-fashioned Polish manner and bade me carry greetings from all the people of Zamosc "to all loyal Poles in America and wherever they may be."

* * *

LAND REFORM

Why start this complicated land reform in the midst of war?

These last days of war were the easiest time for the transfer. The absence of many owners — those killed by the Germans and those who fled with the Germans — made an economic vacuum in which some owners must be found quickly to till the soil. A few weeks' delay would produce new claimants, the previous owners or their heirs. Now was the easiest, least painful time to make the adjustments.

Moreover, there were strong military and political reasons for the reform. Always the landed estates had been centers of reactionary politics. Under the new regime they threatened to become hangouts of terrorist gangs, assassinating civil officials, and army officers. The new peasant owners, on the contrary, were the natural support of the new regime and the natural recruits for the new Polish Army.

The land reform was awakening rural Poland. It aroused energetic support for the new government and produced enthusiastic volunteers for its army. It made millions of peasants statistically aware of the reasons for wanting East Prussia and Pomerania. With all its complexities, therefore, the land reform was not subtracting energy from the war. It was creating new energy for the march on Berlin.

In county after county they came to the formal meetings with the flags and the bands and the national anthem and the Polish soldiers saluting as the title

deeds were conveyed. And so I went with Bienick, the vice-minister of agriculture, to the Radzyn celebration, just one among many that went on in county towns everywhere.

We walked through the ruined market place to the little assembly hall in the frost-bound park. A crowd poured into the plain rectangular buildings, erected long ago without benefit of architecture like an early Pilgrim Fathers' meetinghouse. Two Polish soldier boys, complete with automatics, stood like two pillars on either side of the door; as Bienick approached, they snapped to attention. Then somebody must have given a signal, for as we crossed the threshold the strains of the national anthem came to greet us from a band somewhere inside.

Then the seemingly impenetrable crowd parted as by miracle and an aisle led straight to the stage — straight to the white-red Polish flags and the dark green Christmas trees. Saint Nicholas, in the person of Bienick, was about to bestow on the assembled peasants some thirty thousand acres of land.

The county agent opened with local statistics. Nearly 5000 families were getting land in Radzyn County. An average of nine acres was given to 2162 families of former farm hands and landless peasants. An average of four acres went to 2685 peasant families that formerly had less than five acres. There was dutiful applause. Everybody already knew what he would get.

Then they all settled down to endure the long

speech that is an inevitable part of such occasions. The men in sheepskin coats and the women in big woolen shawls shivered and wriggled their feet for warmth in the freezing hall. A rising wind blew through the bomb-smashed windows. A woman at the end of a row turned toward the wall and opened her coat to nurse a squalling youngster. Nobody paid any attention to her. They were all peasants and many of them had had to bring the kids.

Their gaze centered more and more on Bienick as he told of Polish peasant struggles for a thousand years. Their fight for land was part of the long, long fight for a strong, independent Poland. Always the lords had betrayed their country's interests for the sake of their feudal privileges. This was the lesson of history.

"There was no serfdom in the days of the Piast kingdom. There were other forms of oppression then." He told of ancient peasant uprisings in those semi-tribal times when the son of a peasant might become a prince. Even then the fight for peasant rights was bound up with the fight for Polish independence. "The lords went to the German knights for help against the peasants. The Teutonic Knights helped put down the peasants under the grandson of Boleslaw. . . . So the feudal lords grew stronger.

"In the fourteenth century King Casimir the Great wanted the feudal lords' support for his wars. He bought it by giving them the Statutes of Wislica. Peasants were bound to the land and had to work a

day or two each week for their lord without pay . . . So legal serfdom began. . . . In following centuries sixteen hundred different laws were passed, taking away all human rights. By the Statutes of Piotrkow in 1496, only those of noble descent through both parents could own land or become state officials. This stopped marriages of lords with peasant women since the children could have no rights. Thus the gulf widened between the feudal classes.

"The peasants became serfs. They fled away from the lords. They fled to the open prairies of the east, to the frontier, the Ukraine. The lords followed them with armies, enslaving them and taking more land. The peasants rose up many times. The greatest rising was the one in the Ukraine under Bogdan Khmelnitsky. His free peasants beat the Polish lords by allying themselves with the Russian tsar; thus the Ukrainians came under the Russians who offered more autonomy than the Polish lords would give.

"The Polish lords were not real patriots. Their love was not for their country but for their feudal rights. When the Swedish king took Poland as far as Warsaw, most of the Polish lords joined him to save their privileges. It was not till the Polish peasants came down with pikes from the Carpathians that the Swedes were driven back. King Jan Casimir swore that he would lighten the peasants' burdens because they saved his kingdom. He could not keep his oath because of the feudal lords and so he resigned his throne.

LAND REFORM

"Great Polish patriots, in the days of the American and French revolutions, wished to make Poland a modern state. The constitution we celebrate was passed on May 3rd, 1791, under the influence of Kosciusko and Pulawski. It freed the peasants from serf duties, making them citizens with obligations only to the state. This constitution never became real. The nobles were angry that they could not hang peasants at will, but only the state could do this. So some of them appealed to Empress Catherine of Russia and she sent an army to help suppress those Polish serfs.

"General Kosciusko took up arms for Poland's independence and for the freedom of the peasants. Only through a free peasantry, he said, could a state be strong. The peasants flocked to his banner; the first Polish peasant who ever became an officer was Glowacki in Kosciusko's army. But twice Kosciusko was betrayed by the Polish lords.

"So Poland was beaten and partitioned. The Polish nobles kept their privileges under the Russian tsars. The Polish peasants lost their hope of freedom. And Poland lost her independence for more than a hundred years."

Coming to modern times Bienick told how the young republic was born from the collapse of three empires in the first World War. "We set up in Lublin in 1918 a people's government, and declared that the land was for the peasants, and education was for all the people. . . . But again the lords were afraid for their privileges. So Pilsudski seized power and made

war with Soviet Russia for the sake of the lords' estates in the east. The Polish people were against this war, but the lords kept them quiet by promises of land.

"Once more they deceived the peasants. The 'land reform' they passed sold land at two thousand *zlote* a hectare. What peasant could buy? Some tried to buy and made first payments. But after 1926 when Pilsudski made himself dictator, the landlords got another law fixing the price of land in gold. Peasants who owed four thousand *zlote* now found that they owed twelve thousand. They lost the land and all the money they had paid." The nods in the hall showed that the peasants remembered those so recent bitter days.

The speaker drew to his conclusion: "Generations of peasants have awaited this day when your own peasant committees divide the Polish soil. It is not only land that you take. It is the foundation of Poland's strength and independence. Kosciusko said it: 'Only a free peasantry makes a strong, free country.' We lay this cornerstone of our country's freedom today."

The worn peasant faces under the sheepskin caps and the woolen shawls were intent. Not even the zero cold was felt as they came from the Piast kings down to the present day. The heads were solemnly nodding, affirming their destiny, that the nine acres received today made them a part of history.

Then a quick ripple of applause ran through the

hall as a young officer stepped forward, in uniform, with the Polish eagle on his cap.

"Some people told you that it was dangerous to take this land," he thrust straight at them. "They said that the London Poles would come and take it away and punish you. But you have an army now and I tell you that it is a new kind of army. The old army was officered by the sons of the gentry; they used it to put down peasants' strikes. Our new army supports the peasants and protects their rights. In it peasants' sons can rise to be officers.

"The title deeds you get today are underwritten by the bayonets of our new democratic Polish Army." This was the speech that brought down the house.

CHAPTER IX

Radzyn

THE naked rooms stood up in the air as if on stilts. Under them, over them and around them, probed searching blasts of the December wind.

These two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom, were all that remained of the house. A side-swiping blast had gutted the little bakery on the floor beneath them, leaving only sections of its walls. These were enough to support the second-floor apartment and the steep little staircase by which I climbed to my lodging for the night.

It was after the meeting in the big bare hall with broken windows where the peasants received their title deeds to the parceled-out acres in Radzyn County. Another celebration had been held in the evening — the first Christmas party in Radzyn. The high school was open again. The young folks crowded its small assembly room to suffocation for the first performance of their drama club. The spirited singing and dancing were painfully amateurish, but the teacher explained: "It takes time to learn proper singing and dancing.

These are the first steps of freedom in more than five years."

In the general dancing that followed I met the Polish colonel, Szaniawski, who, after Bor's surrender in Warsaw, had led the escaping insurgents over the river. I didn't want to break into that evening of dance, so I tried to date him for an interview in Lublin. He explained that he seldom came to Lublin, being very busy training soldiers in a camp not far from Radzyn. He had to be back in camp next morning, but he was free for the rest of the night.

"Then here's where I take you down for history. You might get killed before you meet another reporter."

I hauled him mercilessly into the principal's office, where the dancers' coats were piled on a couple of tables and chairs. We shoved the coats on the floor and sat down with notebook and fountain pen, closing our ears to the music down the hall. Bienick drove home to Lublin about midnight, but I was still writing down Szaniawski's story. When the Radzyn County officials promised that there would be another auto sometime in the next two days, I decided to stay over.

I was quite blunt as they discussed the housing of their American guest.

"What interests me is neither the food, nor the bed, nor the privacy, but the heating." I shivered in retrospect when I thought of that afternoon meeting in the freezing hall. So they put me up with the vice-chair-

man of the Rada because he had a Holland stove. They issued two days' extra fuel for me.

That was how I came about one in the morning to those two rooms of Marian Potapczyk, vice-chief of Radzyn County. He slept in the kitchen with his wife and grown son and a male guest, giving me the bed-and-dining room. I gathered that they didn't use it anyway in winter for lack of fuel.

The rooms looked well enough inside. They had once been a neat, modest apartment for the owner of the little bakery shop below. The pale blue calcimined bedroom was unstained even by five years of war. The bombing, however, had shaken out the wall insulation. So the roaring fire they made for me in the big Holland stove availed little. It made the tiles so hot that I could not touch them, but it could not beat back the cold that penetrated the room through the broken walls. Two doors that should have led to adjoining rooms led straight into zero space.

In such rooms the vice-chairman of the county Rada was coughing his life away. I could hear him most of the night through the thin partition. His lungs and kidneys had been irreparably injured in 1943 when a gang of forty-five men hauled him out of the peasant cottage where he was living "underground," beat him, and left him for dead.

I slept warmly enough under the big feather bed in the cold bedroom, but as soon as I rose I hastened to the kitchen for warmth. Mrs. Potapczyk served me

some ersatz coffee made fairly palatable by quantities of milk. She seemed to have enough sugar — Poland has beets and refineries — but she brought in a small pat of butter with such reverence that I took from it sparingly.

Then Marian Potapczyk told me his story — how he organized the underground government and how he took power when the Red Army came in. I wrote it down in his kitchen as well as I could with freezing fingers, huddled up in a big comforter from the feather bed. Sitting in these two rooms in the bombed town where the county commissioner functioned, I couldn't help thinking that it was much more comfortable being the Polish government in London than being it on the spot.

When the Germans overran Poland, Potapczyk was a mechanic in a textile mill in Lodz. His German fellow workers told him: "You'd better clear out; your activities in the trade-union have made you a marked man." He took the hint and cleared just before the Gestapo raided the workers' houses.

"I came to a village in Radzyn County and worked at repair jobs. When the Germans began raiding the villages I moved from place to place."

One hundred and ten thousand people lived in Radzyn County when Potapczyk moved in. There were eighty-four thousand left when he sat in his bomb-ruined house reporting to me. Nearly a quarter of the population had been murdered by the Germans in various ways — the usual proportion in Po-

land. "They began with the Jews and then the Poles who befriended Jews and then all the leaders of the Polish people who were not completely subservient — these they called Communists."

Potapczyk, a wiry, energetic fellow in those days, joined the underground Home Army, under the orders of the government-in-exile in London. "But I got fed up with their policy of watchful waiting. There was a time when a couple of Gestapo officers could come to a village by night and take fourteen or fifteen men away. The Home Army did nothing to prevent. It was 'saving its strength' to take power when the Germans, beaten by the Allies, should withdraw from Poland of themselves. That was the talk. Meanwhile some of the county leaders of the Home Army were getting on very well with the Germans. But we of the rank and file were being deported and killed.

"It also made me angry when the Home Army betrayed Russian prisoners who escaped from the Germans. There was a camp of these Russians not far away; they were starving. Sometimes a few escaped and went looking for help on the roads and in the woods. I had my fifteen-year-old boy out looking for them. We hid them in the village, armed them and sent them east. These were the first fighting partisan bands in Poland. The Home Army leaders considered them enemies, but I considered them Allies."

Proudly Potapczyk got out a long sheet of paper

to show me. Crisscrossed with pale blue and red lines, it was originally a page from a school copybook. It was entitled "Protocol Number Three" and was written in Polish on one side and in Russian on the other. It reported a secret meeting of escaped Russian prisoners together with Poles on May 1, 1942, in the woods near Sewernuwka village. Among the Russians were two pilots, a radio-telegraph man, two political workers, and several officers. They had formed a partisan band of twenty-seven men called by the name of the famous Cossack partisan, Chapayev. They had nine rifles, three pistols, and fifteen grenades according to the report.

"We collected these arms from supplies that the soldiers of the old Polish Army had buried in the earth. The Chapayev band started east, hoping to fight its way through to the Red Army. A man of the Home Army betrayed them before they had gone twenty miles."

"How did you know who betrayed them?"

"Three of them escaped and told us everything. The twenty-seven Russians were in poor physical condition after that German prison camp. They reached a village eighteen miles away and saw an isolated cottage near the woods that looked like a good place to rest. The old peasant who owned it said okay. He had a wife, two small children, and a grown-up son. The older son went out while they were resting. Soon Germans came and surrounded the cottage in force. They threw grenades into the house, killing the par-

tisans and also the old man and his family. Three Russians escaped; they were in the woods at the time looking for berries. They saw the son together with the Germans. We knew that he was a member of the Home Army."

Potapczyk dropped out of the Home Army. He began secretly to form a band of partisans with a different brand of politics. The county leaders of the Home Army suspected that he had become active in another direction. They tested him by proposing him for important work on their illegal paper and then by offering to make him their township commander; both of these offers he refused.

"I knew that they would hold this against me, so I changed my residence to a village where there were no Home Army members. My next door neighbor betrayed me. Forty-five Home Army men came by night. I knew there were forty-five, for when they got us out in the neighbor's yard, they lined up in a square and 'numbered off.' They stripped me mother-naked and beat me up. They beat up my son and six of my partisans, but they gave it to me the hardest for they suspected that I was the leader. They left me for dead. I was in bed for a long time and will never be healthy again."

Ill-health did not stop his underground activities. He could no longer move easily through the woods but he became the partisans' contact in the village. He drew in new members. He affiliated his band with others of like persuasion and brought them into the

newly organized People's Army under General Rola-Zymierski.

"Our local bands were all small ones, but there were many of them. We could not have large groups like the partisans in the big forests and swamps of White Russia. Our woods are smaller and villages are near to each other; there is no place for big bands to hide. But even in Radzyn there were highways where the woods came close on both sides and where for months the Germans did not dare to pass." Potapczyk proudly showed me such a highway later when we went to Lublin together in an open truck.

Friction between the Home Army and these newer partisan groups increased. When the Germans were routed at Stalingrad the Home Army's attitude of watchful waiting sharpened into a clear hostility to the Russians. In part this reflected the broken relations between the Soviet Government and the Polish government-in-exile over the Katyn forest incident. In part it derived from a jealous fear of the new partisan groups who hailed the Red Army as an ally. Throughout 1943 the armed forces of the Home Army made many attacks on the new partisans.

Captain Meluch, who commanded the operations in the woods after Potapczyk's injury, came to our kitchen conference to give examples of these attacks.

"I was one of nine who took a room in a village one Saturday night to rest up after a long time in the woods. Early next morning a man of the Home Army went away as if to church. Soon a hundred men came,

disarmed the nine of us, and took us to the woods, where they questioned us about our politics. Then they said: 'We don't need people like you. It is better to kill you than Germans.' Two of us got away; the others were killed. They were very fine fellows, loyal patriots, and good friends."

Another incident related by Meluch occurred in Boruv village, south of Lublin, in early autumn of 1943. Thirty partisans of the People's Army, seeking for unity against the Germans, secured a conference with representatives of the Home Army and the NSZ. It was cautiously arranged, all conferees leaving their arms aside. Six armed men suddenly appeared, shouting 'Hands up.' They rounded up members of the People's Army and killed them in the woods.

"They didn't shoot them but cut off their heads with an axe. They yelled: 'We don't have to fight the Germans now, they're beaten anyway. Now we have to fight the Russians and you damned Communists.' A man of the Home Army came over to us later because of his disgust with such actions. He gave us the details of the deaths."

In such a situation the orders received by Potapczyk in January 1944 were rather amazing. By this time he was leader of fifty-four armed men and affiliated with many more. After the New Year's Eve meeting in Warsaw that set up the Rada Narodowa and the People's Army, Potapczyk's chief called him into the staff of the area and told him to organize a rada for Radzyn — a People's Council for the county. Potapczyk

asked what organizations to include and was told to invite the Home Army, the People's Army, the Peasant Battalions, the Polish Socialist Party, the Peasants' Party, the Polish Workers' Party, and reliable nonparty people.

"I went to all of them and got their delegates." It seemed to me that he was passing rather lightly over what must have been a fairly dangerous endeavor. So I asked how he got the Home Army delegate. He went to their county leaders – they were in another village – and found some of the men who had beaten him up.

"Are you still alive! Perhaps we'd better finish you now," they taunted.

"Can do! But then you won't live long either. For now I have fifty-four armed men out there in the woods."

The Home Army chiefs looked at him with more respect. They even decided to send a delegate to his rada. "He wasn't a very useful delegate," commented Potapczyk. "He was just sticking around to see what was going on."

Secret meetings in villages chose other delegates. During February 1944 Potapczyk engineered the secret elections of village and township chiefs throughout the county and a county council of fifty members. "These could not be really democratic elections," he apologized to me, "for they had to be held in secret and we could not trust everyone. The first task of the secret rada was to hide food from the Germans, keep-

ing it for ourselves and for the Red Army. Our mayors were ready to take over when the Germans left."

The Red Army came in July 21st, on a Sunday. Radzyn was quickly surrounded and there was little fighting in the town. When the Red tanks roared into the German airfield outside the town the thirty-three planes had not even time to take off. The pilots either raised their hands or ran away to the woods. The partisans hunted them and turned them over to the Red Army. "Later we had a celebration and gave a swell banner to the liberators of Radzyn. They were Cossack motorized cavalry from the First White Russian front.

"When the Germans began to flee, my colonel ordered me into Radzyn. He made me emergency *starosta.* I came in with nine armed men even before the Red Army. Our job was to prevent fires, bury corpses, stop looting, grab the Gestapo documents, and find spies. One of the nine was captain of the partisans; he became chief of police. Another was a learned fellow who could write protocols. We chose at once a citizens' militia to help us, giving them arm bands but no arms. We were not yet a regular government. We could not yet disclose our rada. We were right at the front; the Germans were bombing the town and might return.

"So for a week I ran the County." A glint of pride flashed in Potapczyk's face. "I went personally into the Gestapo jail cells and examined the documents. I got the proof that four of the men I had lost

had been denounced by leaders of the Home Army."

When I pressed for details he replied calmly, but he was repressing deep feeling: "On the walls of the cells were many inscriptions, such as 'Jesus Christ save me from this torture!' In one place were two prisoners' names written together with the same pencil. One, my very good friend, was dead; the other was alive in a village. I went to him and asked what had happened to the other. He told me what he had learned in the jail. The Germans tortured my friend terribly, but he persisted in denying that he was either a partisan or a Communist. Then they brought in a certain member of the Home Army who said to his face: 'I saw you in the woods with weapons and with a Russian prisoner of war.' So of course they killed him. But he told his cell mate the traitor's name."

"Where is the informer now? Did he flee with the Germans?"

"He is still in the village. He does not even know that we know." Answering my look of surprise, Potapczyk explained: "Some day we will try him. It is not yet time to have so much trouble in the village." I learned that Potapczyk's personal betrayer, through whom the forty-five came to beat him, was still at large.

After six days of Potapczyk's personal rule the first open session of the county rada was called on July 27th. "The Germans were still bombing us here — that was the week when most of the ruin was done — so the Rada met in a near-by village. Delegates came

from all the *gminas* (townships) and many ordinary citizens came to listen. We chose a president and vice-president, a *starosta* and vice-*starosta* and five others for the presidium. These nine came into Radzyn and took power."

The six-day county dictator became the new vice-president. When I asked the reason for this demotion he answered simply: "I was from Lodz and we needed a local man."

All the next week they were holding village elections. "Open, legal ones, for the first Rada elections were secret and in conspiracy. Now everybody over twenty-one could come to the meetings. They chose their *soltys,* the village chief. They also chose delegates to the *gmina,* one to three delegates, according to the size of the village. After this the *gmina* Radas chose delegates to the *powiat* (county) Rada."

"Were the village elections by ballot or by show of hands?"

"In some villages everybody agreed. This was especially when the old *soltys* that the Germans put out was still alive; then they just put him back again. If anyone asked for secret voting and a second person supported him they had to find paper and ballot. This was not very easy for there was little paper and few pencils. In Davida village, there were seven candidates for *soltys* so of course they had to have paper ballots. I myself attended fifteen village elections. Ten of these were by secret balloting."

To my query whether the different political parties

put up the opposing candidates in such villages as had them, Potapczyk gave a negative answer. "These first elections were without parties, because no parties were yet organized in our county. The parties organized later and had the right to add their representative both to the *gmina* and the *powiat* Radas."

The full-grown Radzyn County Rada had fifty members at the time of my visit. Thirty-two were chosen from the sixteen townships, two from each. Fifteen were delegates from various organizations: the political parties, the teachers' union, the doctors, merchants, the association of small peasants. Three members were "experts," co-opted by the Rada for technical work.

The kitchen fire had long since burned out; so we left Potapczyk's quarters for the county offices. In Radzyn three highways meet. Right at the junction a woman soldier of the Red Army stood on a tiny circular platform, twirling her baton smartly to guide the passing traffic down roads marked "to Warsaw," "to Lublin," "to Brest." Behind her the charred gray walls of what had been a gracious county building stood roofless and windowless against the winter sky. The former market place with its rows of shops was indicated only by jagged walls and heaps of rubble.

At the edge of the frost-bound park under thin bare branches were three graves marked with large crosses. Six "liberators of Radzyn" were buried there, two to a grave. All were Russians. Poles also had been killed in the freeing of Radzyn, but they had been

buried in the churchyard as good Catholics. Everybody knew that Russians weren't Catholics; so they seemed to belong in the park. The crosses? But a grave has to have a cross. Some peasants were dropping wreaths and branches of evergreen on the graves in passing.

We continued our discussion in the ramshackle building where county and municipal departments crowded each other, a dozen civil servants per room. To create a county government from scratch must have been more difficult, I remarked, than my host's easy account inferred. Potapczyk agreed on the difficulty, but his reasons were other than mine.

"It was very hard, because we had no paper and pencils and the townsfolk ran away to the villages because of the bombs. It is still hard because so many buildings are destroyed. You saw how our big beautiful county building was bombed and burned. We wanted to take over another big building of former Jewish shops whose owners were dead. The Red Army needed that. When they move on west we'll have more space. The Committee in Lublin has given money to repair our county building, but it will take many years. Five engineers are working on the plans.

"We haven't our democracy very perfect," he continued. "Last week we had a bad complaint."

He showed me the "complaint." It was a document of three pages in single-space typing. Various investigators had made their comments at the bottom; these showed that the rather worn paper had been from

a village to Lublin and back again. Potapczyk explained that at one of the township meetings in October the president of the county Rada threw out seven of the elected delegates and put in his own appointees. Villagers had sent a complaint to Lublin, where the department dealing with local governments forwarded it to Radzyn for report. The president of the Radzyn County Rada had been deposed for his dictatorial action and a new president had been elected. "A very good man," said Potapczyk. "A peasant." The villagers had forwarded a vote of thanks saying: "Now we see that we are getting democracy in Poland."

In one of the rooms of the county building was a long line-up of peasants. They were receiving their title deeds to land since only a small proportion of the transfers had been made at the formal meeting the day before. There was still a question which nobody seemed to be asking. It might be a delicate question but the answer was needed in America. So I asked it.

"Where are all those former landowners?" I didn't suppose that anyone had kept track of them, but I wanted a general idea.

I got much more than I expected. Potapczyk, quite unembarrassed, replied: "Better ask Jan Zaorski. He's one of them and he'll tell you about the others. He's next door in the land department."

Strictly speaking, it was against the law that Zaorski, formerly owning four hundred acres, should

remain in the county at all. Landowners were expected to leave lest they interfere with the land reform. But all laws have exceptions and Zaorski was an honest guy who knew so much about the farms of Radzyn County that the county wouldn't let him go. He was much at home in a room with three other county officials, each receiving a series of callers.

He was having a hot argument with two Polish Army officers as I entered. They bullied each other and shouted and finally clapped each other on the back and shook hands. I gathered that they were fighting over the transport of army grain. It was also clear that Zaorski knew his stuff; he took no back talk from anyone.

"I collect the food levies in this county and deliver the army's quota," he explained. "The peasants don't refuse the grain but transport is difficult. It's hard enough for a peasant to haul the grain to the county warehouse when he comes to market. I've just got them trained to that. Now the army wants the peasants to take it straight to their camp; they say they haven't the trucks. I'm making them take it from the warehouse. I can't check on the food deliveries if they're made all over the place. But I've made a concession to the army; they can draw their month's supply any time it comes handy instead of week by week. I didn't want to do it, for in less than a month I bet they'll be moving west and eating off another county. But after all it's from the same pot."

How did it happen that a former landlord was

allowed to remain in an official capacity in this home county? Was he a member of one of the partisan bands or of the influential political parties? Zaorski replied in the negative.

"I'm a hundred per cent non-party but of course I'm known as a progressive democrat or they wouldn't have put me in. I helped the partisans with food and shelter. That was only being a patriotic Pole. I'm known here as an engineer and an agronom and perhaps as a man more interested in administrative problems than in private property. Besides my own former estate I had been receiver for several other estates here that went bankrupt and that had to be put on their feet. I am supposed to know how to make a farm succeed. At first they made me chief county agent. I refused this job because it included handling of the land reform. I told them that as a former landlord it wasn't proper for a man to hang himself. They put somebody else in to confiscate my estate while I took on questions of production and supply."

Zaorski had just finished his accounts with the Red Army. "They are very friendly and liberal in their accounting. They accepted receipts that I would never have taken as a private businessman." He explained that when units of the advancing army took food from the peasants they gave receipts, which were later honored by the Lublin authorities against the food deliveries.

"Some of these receipts are very informal. A peasant will turn in a paper bearing the words in hand-

writing: 'I, Lt. Ivan S., got a cow from so-and-so.' There is no seal, no address, not even the number of the division. The Red Army accepted these receipts as authentic since they knew that they had units in that area and that advance patrols are in a hurry and aren't giving numbers anyway."

Zaorski knew every farm and every former landowner in Radzyn County. He gave me a full survey. The confiscated land totaled 40,000 acres, of which 10,000 were woodland taken over by the forest reserve, leaving 30,000 to be divided among the peasants. The land had been reckoned in fifty-eight estates, but held under only twenty-eight separate ownerships. Eight of these – including the fourteen largest and best farms – were seized by the Germans during the occupation. Confiscation here was simple, for the Germans moved out as the Red Army moved in.

"There were thus a presumable twenty Polish landowners, but only six were actually in possession when the land reform came in," Zaorski summed up, adding as an afterthought: "That's including me."

The fate of the three largest Polish owned estates indicated what happened to landowners during the occupation. The largest estate in the county, 4300 acres, belonged to Milanow. The Germans threw the owner into a concentration camp where he died. His wife and children went to live with a married daughter across the Vistula. The estate was under an overseer when the new law came in.

The owner of the Rudenecz estate – 4100 acres –

lived in Warsaw. "Where he is since the uprising nobody knows."

The third largest estate comprised 2000 acres. "The owner was a young fellow recently married and very much devoted to his bride. He left when he heard the guns of the front approaching. He was afraid for his wife."

Summing up the seventeen remaining Polish landowners, Zaorski stated that six had been jailed by the Germans, five went away "in the last twenty-four hours when our fate was being decided," and six remained on their land until ordered to leave. Two of the latter had been jailed for hindering the land reform.

"Those who were jailed by the Germans – can you tell me why?"

"Because they were Poles," shrugged Zaorski.

"And those who fled with the Germans? Do you also think them pro-German as charged in Lublin?"

"I hate to think that any Pole is really pro-German," said Zaorski, after a moment's thought. "That's too simple a way of putting a very complicated set of facts. Five years of German occupation winnowed out all conspicuous Poles. Those who openly opposed the Nazis landed in concentration camps. Those who compromised with the Nazis even a little became suspect in the eyes of Polish patriots. At the last moment when the front approached with inevitable casualties and chaos – well, it is hard in such a moment to

decide what to do. Many perhaps fled in a moment of panic."

Thus he explained his fellow landowners. The fact remained that in that moment of panic some people stayed on their farms and others fled. The choice was made not perhaps in that moment but by actions during five years. In any event the land reform in Radzyn, as elsewhere in Poland, had been greatly simplified by the absence of most of the landowners.

Chill and exhaustion were setting in as I finished my talk with Zaorski. I had been too long in cold rooms. The ersatz morning coffee lacked my accustomed stimulus. After a skimpy lunch in an unheated restaurant I went back to Potapczyk's apartment; I was frozen to the bone. In overcoat and knitted cap I crawled into the feather bed.

Half waking some time later I was aware of someone in the room. Turning my head drowsily — I had no strength to raise it from the pillow — I saw through the mists of sleep a man in a sheepskin jacket and peasant cap, standing in the middle of the room with feet firmly planted, motionless, looking at me. He was of medium height, solidly built, with hair just beginning to turn gray and a dark, bristly chin. His face was that of a peasant, but also the face of a man who has known and survived everything that can be endured.

I wanted to talk with him, but only half succeeded. I was still drugged with sleep. He said something that

sounded at the time like "I am the Rada Narodowa." This did not surprise me at all, for I was too dazed to remember that the Rada Narodowa was a council of fifty people and that probably he said he was its president. At the moment I thought he was really the Rada Narodowa incarnate in that room.

He said something about the different ways men had of looking at life and the world. Something about Americans having many illusions. "Here in Poland after five years of war we see things as they are." Or perhaps I should put it: "Here we see reality." It was the impact of his thought I got rather than exact words; then he was gone. I was still too exhausted to rise. Half an hour later I really awoke and wanted to find him or to know whether it had been a dream. At the county building I learned that the new president of the Rada — the one that Potapczyk said was "a good man, a peasant" — had come to town on some official business, dropped in at Potapczyk's to meet the American guest and, finding me sleeping, had gone back to his farm some fourteen miles away. He would not be returning, they thought, for several days.

Not in all my sojourn in Poland have I so wished to continue conversation with any man. Yet I did not choose to stay longer or to go to his farm to see him again. I had stayed over to talk with Colonel Szaniawski, for I wanted from him a story full of facts, in which time and the length of the interview counted. But with this man it was not length of time or num-

ber of facts that counted. It did not matter whether he had really said certain words or whether I had dreamed them. It was as if, in that half trance between sleep and wakefulness, I had met and known the essence of a man and of a county.

I understood now why Marian Potapczyk could be only vice-president of the Rada. Potapczyk was from Lodz. He had fought well for Radzyn; he would probably die for Radzyn. But this man was Radzyn itself. He was peasant Poland; not the dark, isolated peasant of the past but the peasant of today and tomorrow, acting and understanding.

Potapczyk came in a little later and his wife set out supper in the kitchen. I managed to consume the huge portion of cabbage-and-potato soup and some of the boiled potatoes – butterless, for that precious morning portion was gone. I balked at the raw chunks of fat-back that she pressed upon me as a delicacy. She saw through my pretense of eating and kept insisting that I was not taking enough.

Watching our friendly conflict, Potapczyk's eyes dwelt lovingly on his wife. "She wants that Americans should think Poles are nice people," he said with the ghost of a smile.

"And aren't they?" I smiled back.

To my surprise his face clouded. When he spoke it was slowly and with a deep sigh. "I also could wish you to think so." His eyes probed the ruins outside the window as he put the question: "Is that a nice town?"

Taken aback I sought for words. I said something about "heroic." He shook his head.

"It is a broken town," he said heavily. "It will take long to rebuild. But the breaking of the buildings is nothing to the breaking they did to the people."

In the silence that followed I recalled the afternoon visitor who had said: "We see things as they are." I was only writing about people in a land reform and a national reconstruction; I could indulge in fine words. Potapczyk had to fight in that reconstruction.

"We are people who hid in cellars. We are people who were slaves for five years. How do slaves live? Some by bribing or cheating their masters, some by selling the loot from murdered Jews, by selling their neighbors. Some escaped to the woods and fought. Many — and these were the best ones — died.

"Those men who took away my health, who were they? Peasants with big families, selling me perhaps to save their children, or ignorantly deceived. Some day we shall have time to weigh and judge them. Not now. They are not our chief danger. They are people with whom we have to build."

"What is your chief danger?" I asked, appalled. I thought of enemy spies, of graft in high places, of stark hunger and cold.

Potapczyk spoke slowly, considering: "I think it is those who believe we have won the victory already; that we can stop."

CHAPTER X

A Government Is Born

ON a New Year's Eve in Lublin in a large round hall with yellow marble columns I saw the new government of Poland born.

Exactly a year had passed since the secret meeting had organized the underground Rada Narodowa in Warsaw. From its beginnings in that hidden flat, the Rada had spread across the country even under the German terror. It had organized county governments — such as that in Radzyn — and prepared a People's Army of many small, far-flung partisan detachments. Its delegates had crossed German lines, reached Red Army headquarters, preparing for the coming battles to liberate the land. When the Red Army — and the First Polish Army of General Sigmund Berling with it — forced the Bug in July 1944, the Rada, still underground in most of Poland, had set up the Committee of National Liberation to exercise openly the emergency functions of government in that eastern third of Poland that was free.

Month by month the new regime was tested in action. Village, city, county, and provincial radas had

long been organized. The National Rada had steadily expanded by delegates from new organizations or elected from the lower radas in an ascending scale. It had reached one hundred and five members in the liberated territory, with an unannounced number in the Nazi-occupied area. A stage had been reached in which it was considered desirable to constitute formally a provisional government, since the Committee was doing actual governmental work.

Some simple soldier boys that I met were surprised that this new formality should be needed. "We thought the Committee was already the government. To whom did we take our oath of allegiance?" To the mind of the average citizen the test of all these forms was simply whether or not they worked. Did they bring order out of the chaos left by the Nazis? Did they rally the citizens' support and make it possible to live and work? Did they stabilize the state?

The answers to these questions could not be found in Lublin discussions. Here, as in the days of the New Deal under Roosevelt, one could hear anything: the most glowing hopes, the most intemperate attacks. Nor had national elections yet been able to determine the answers. Two thirds of Poland was not yet freed, and time would be required for the millions of Poles scattered in foreign lands to come home. Yet answers of a very practical kind had been given.

The first one had come in early autumn when the peasants obeyed the decree on food quotas and gave the required amount under order of the local radas

without military compulsion. A second answer came when civil servants and industrial workers took jobs in terms of the new food supply, thus stabilizing the routine of life. A third was given when people accepted as legal tender the new regime's money, backed only by future promises and faith. A fourth, when young men took mobilization into the army, which in a few months doubled in size. A fifth, when passes issued by various "resorts" were honored by the meager transport services. Lastly, and in some ways most important, the peasants had answered by parceling nearly a million acres through locally elected committees and tilling the soil on the basis of the new regime's title deeds.

Constitution of a formal government had been delayed six months pending not only this domestic organization, but also agreement with some of the members of the Polish government-in-exile in London. Nothing had come of the many conferences; in fact, the London Poles, after several cabinet crises, had even more reactionary chiefs. It seemed time now to go ahead without them since the internal strength had been proved.

The great offensive that lay ahead also called for a formal government. Everybody knew that the Red Army, with the accompanying Polish Army, would soon break the German defenses along the Vistula and sweep westward to liberate the rest of Poland. The various leaders would at once scatter from Lublin to other cities and provinces where they would have to

set up civil authority in all the chaos and with all the disabilities of communication and transport just behind a great front. They needed for this much wider task the authority and coherence of formal governmental power.

The Krajowa Rada Narodowa assembled at ten o'clock on the morning of December 31st, 1944, in a hall of the Committee's Headquarters. Ninety-eight deputies attended. They sat at three long tables radiating from a head table or presidium. Other deputies from German-occupied Poland had crossed the front to bring reports and proposals secretly before the Congress, but they were not exposed to view at the open session.

Marble columns and green potted plants separated the assembly from an outer circle of visitors and press. When the Rada convened the foreigners present were the diplomatic representatives of the USSR and of France — it was the French representative's first public appearance and evoked tremendous applause — and the Soviet press. For the first half hour I was the only American reporter present. Then five other Anglo-American correspondents dashed in by much belated train from Moscow, not taking time even to go to their hotel.

The proceedings were dignified and solemn, accompanied by the national anthem, the formal oath of office by all deputies. Bierut as President of the Rada, Morawski as chairman of the Committee, and

General Zymierski as commander in chief made reports. Representatives of the four political parties, of various provinces, and of public organizations gave in short speeches their reasons why it was expedient to constitute a provisional government now. The general tenor was that the Rada now contained leaders from all sections of the Polish people, had public backing, and had shown ability to organize the state.

My eight weeks in various parts of liberated Poland gave me an inside view of the Rada's make-up and enabled me to judge the claims of the various deputies. I saw before me among them many acquaintances, the variety of whose work I knew.

The chief figures supplemented each other rather effectively. Boleslaw Bierut, the quiet, keen theoretician, obviously the chief political brains; Edward Osubka-Morawski, friendly, accessible, effusive, especially expansive in mass meetings of peasants or workers, and apparently easy to get on with; General Rola-Zymierski, the experienced military man; Dr. Hilary Minc, economic analyst with a grasp of Poland's resources.

Then there sat that handsome blue-eyed dynamo of a Spychalski, architect-engineer in Warsaw city-planning, partisan warrior, army man, energetic mayor now of Warsaw-Praga. Near by in vivid contrast was Father Borowiec, the priest who was chairman of the Rzeczow Voveyovstwo Rada, governor of a fair-sized state. And George Strachelski, *voyevod* from Bialystok, who fought to revive the industries

of an utterly ruined city, and had put the land reform through first of all the provinces.

Of educationalists there was Dr. Skrzeszewski, graduate of Cracow and of the Sorbonne, who had brought nearly a million children into school under devoted teachers, some of whom came barefoot across the battle front. And Dr. Waclaw Rabe, once professor of Zoology in Lvov University, now rector of the new Curie State University in Lublin, where professors from four great university cities tried to teach science and medicine from memory since the Germans had destroyed most of the books. And Jan Karol Wende, novelist and poet, now collecting books from the ruins for new public libraries.

Then there was Casimir Witaszewski, once secretary of the biggest trade-union in Lodz and labor member of the city council, now general secretary of a trade-union movement that counted already one hundred and twenty thousand members. And General Zawadzki, at the moment responsible for training the Polish Army in ideals of democratic citizenship. And Edward Bertold whose ability to organize peasant committees had brought him step by step to a top post in agriculture. And Dr. George Morzycki who went from ten years in the Warsaw Institute of Hygiene founded by the Rockefeller Foundation to handle the antityphus fight throughout Poland, and thence to become partisan surgeon in the woods.

The youngest deputy, Helene Jaworska, was a charming girl of twenty-two – she looked seventeen

— with a smile as winning and sweet as that of a debutante. To look at her was to want to embrace her, protecting her from the world. Yet she had sat in my room in her captain's uniform and told how she, with three other young people, dropped thermite into German granaries under guise of an evening's stroll and flirtation. She had been the youth delegate to the illegal Rada a year before. She had also struggled more than a day through sewers waist-deep in filth to bring to the Red Army the first exact news of the Warsaw uprising and the disposition of the insurgents. At the moment she was chairman of the Inter-Party Youth Committee, and deputy in the new government.

These are only a few of the strong personalities I happened to recognize. Other deputies had similar claims to leadership among other sections of Polish citizenry. After a day's speeches, they voted unanimously to constitute a provisional government which should hold power until Poland was entirely freed and new general elections held.

The form of the new government included the Krajowa Rada Narodowa, a legislative body whose membership was eventually to reach four hundred and forty-four, and an executive cabinet — what Europeans call "the Government" and Americans call "the Administration." The administration is chosen by the legislative branch and is responsible to it, as in France and Great Britain. Bierut's function, as President of the Rada, lacks the administrative duties and party

role of the President of the United States; he presides over all parties without officially representing any of them, like the President of France or the Speaker in the House of Commons.

The choice of New Year's Eve for the announcement of the Provisional Government proved shrewd political timing. Not only was it the anniversary of the first illegal Rada, it was the first New Year's Eve in six years in which Poles had been permitted to hold their cherished parties. The happiness of a hundred formal and informal celebrations, the hopes of a coming year of full Polish liberation, all combined with the cheers for the new Provisional Government. All Lublin was in a cheering mood.

We Anglo-American correspondents went from the solemn Rada session to a theater where thirteen hundred peasants in a co-operative congress cheered the new government. They also cheered President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, the Anglo-American journalists, and the imminent prospects of Poland's freedom. That evening we went to three successive banquets: a government banquet in the marble-columned hall, a peasant banquet-picnic where people stood up munching sandwiches, too crowded to sit down or to dance, and an all-night ball of the army. Everywhere they were eating, drinking, dancing, singing, hailing the coming liberation. The momentum was tremendous.

At the government banquet the irrepressible Spychalski was the center of the noisiest corner. It seems

some people from other cities had been saying that Warsaw was so utterly destroyed that it couldn't be used as a capital for ten years. But the delegation from Warsaw-Praga intended everybody to know that their city might be badly battered but was still Poland's capital and very much on the map. So they noisily toasted Warsaw and everything connected with Warsaw.

Next day Spychalski came quietly to my room and gave me the long-desired interview about that first illegal Rada, of which he had handled the technical organization. "Up in Warsaw I was always too busy to talk to you," he apologized, "but down here there's not so much to do!" Forming a government for Poland was just nothing to the Warsaw mayor's energy!

He talked as he had done the night before. "The Polish people feel Warsaw as their capital. That is why many of us remained underground in Warsaw during German rule. We organized there the first partisan detachments around which the new army coalesced. Peasants everywhere formed bands to fight the Germans, but only when direction came from Warsaw did the movement gain nation-wide scope. That was also why we organized the Rada Narodowa in Warsaw though it was hardest there under the very noses of the Gestapo."

Spychalski laughed at my supposition that New Year's Eve had been chosen so that the illegal assembly could meet under guise of a New Year's party. "Poles couldn't even hold New Year's parties. We

chose that time because the Gestapo would be holding parties of their own.

"The delegates came from various parts of Poland. They traveled unarmed lest they be searched and shot. They did not even know the place of assembly. This was known only to me and to one other – he is still 'in conspiracy' beyond the Vistula." (Later this "other" turned out to be Casimir Mijal who, after the liberation, became the first *voyevod* of the Lodz district.) "We two picked the delegates up one by one and brought them to the apartment between five and seven in the evening, since eight o'clock marked the curfew, after which only people with special Gestapo permits might be on the streets.

"We had arms in the apartment – brought by local people less exposed to risk than the delegates. We were prepared to sell our lives dearly if discovered. There were delegates there from the Peasants' Party, the Polish Socialist Party, the Polish Workers' Party, underground trade-unions, groups of non-party democrats, the Youth Union of Struggle, writers' groups, co-operative groups, and delegates from partisan detachments of the People's Guard, the People's Militia, the Peasants' Battalions, and from some local formations of the Home Army. We conferred all night. Next morning we went out, one by one, between five-thirty and seven o'clock when curfew was over but the winter morning was still dark."

That night the decision was taken to weld far-flung partisan bands into a People's Army to co-operate

with the Red Army on its arrival, and to organize underground local governments prepared to take power at the moment of liberation. How they organized and built themselves into the life of Poland has been told in previous chapters of this book.

"Are you surprised that in a single year the illegal Rada Narodowa has grown into the Provisional Government?" was my next question.

"No," he replied. "We planned, we organized, we aroused the Polish people, and this is the natural result."

CHAPTER XI

Warsaw — the Capital

THE great offensive began like a symphony with a single movement. On Friday, January 12th, when the ice finally held on the wide swamps along the Vistula, Marshal Konev's First Ukrainian Army struck from Sandomir in Southern Poland, broke enemy entrenchments, and advanced twenty-five miles in two days. Thereafter he swept west with accelerating speed.

On Sunday two new movements were woven into the battle symphony. Two other great armies drove west. Marshal Zhukov's First White Russian Army — including divisions of the First Polish — struck from bridgeheads west of the Vistula in Central Poland and took the city of Radom and thirteen hundred other populated places in two days. Simultaneously Marshal Rokossovsky's Second White Russian Army swung into action in the north, driving across the frozen swamps where the Narew joins the Vistula.

A Polish officer told me of the staggering concentration of fire power that breached nine successive fortified lines. There were five hundred big artillery

pieces to the kilometer where he was stationed — one every seven feet. After the break-through the armored spearheads drove rapidly forward; in one place Zhukov's forces advanced seventy miles in a single spectacular day. Infantry followed day and night by every kind of conveyance. Engineers rapidly repaired any railways and bridges that the Germans had destroyed. The unbroken plentiful flow of shells and gasoline to the front astonished the military experts of the world.

Even a civilian like myself, charting it on a map, could not miss the superbly daring maneuvers of these great armies in their complex harmony. Each developed a dozen themes which suddenly interwove with some theme of the others. One army would drive deep into enemy territory, leaving both flanks apparently exposed to enemy fortress towns. Just as the Germans turned to snap the reckless spearheads, a supporting army would strike across vast distances to encircle the German thrust and smash it finally.

The typical strategy in taking a city was to bypass it with great speed, as if to another destination, and then swing in a wide arc to cut the German communications behind the city and take it from an unexpected side. Red Army troops entering Radom from the west found the German Army staff seated in their offices writing orders. Zhukov's army took Warsaw by storm from the north, west, and south simultaneously — a triple blow from every direction except the expected east. On the same day Konev's army reached clear across South Poland, swung around Czenstoch-

owa, that "holy" fortress city facing on the German border, and entered it from the direction of Berlin. Even the ghetto factories were still working here with eight thousand Jews, the largest group saved in Poland. One prong of Konev's forces then made a backward thrust into historic Cracow, taking it so unaware and so undamaged that it looks today like a city that has never seen the war.

Similarly Zhukov smashed on Lodz from the "wrong" direction, taking it intact at a single blow. Then one great sector of his army drove northwest apparently on Torun. Just outside this city it diverged left toward Bydgoszcz at such speed that the Germans there had no time for effective defense. Rokossovsky attended to Torun a few days later by a sideswipe from East Prussia, gaining an additional springboard for the drive on Danzig. Maneuvers in Pomerania then became so surprising and so fast that the joke arose about Zhukov and Rokossovsky as "experts at encircling each other."

By February 1st, the Red Army was pounding at the German fortress cities of the central Oder, had crossed the river in the south, and was threatening its mouth in the north at Stettin. Zhukov's army had advanced three hundred and forty-two miles in less than three weeks. Except for a small bit of seacoast at the mouth of the Vistula, where Danzig was under attack from three sides, all of Poland had been freed. Most of the western cities had been taken undamaged by the swift advance. Nearly two million tons of coal

that the Germans had not had time to take away lay on the surface of the ground in Silesia.

The assignments given to the Polish Army in this offensive were especially inspiring to Polish patriots. Theirs were the troops who actually entered Warsaw. Russian forces encircled the capital twenty-five miles out, cutting the German communications while the Polish First crossed the Vistula from its forty-mile front at Praga and stormed into the city from the north and the south. Poles also formed the spearhead that broke the famous Pomorzk Wall into Pomerania, swept to the Baltic between Stettin and Kolberg and, spreading along the coast, took the latter naval base, where some of the German pocket battleships were made. These victories had for Poles a special meaning; battles for that seacoast have been waged between Poles and Germans for a thousand years.

Polish armored forces together with Red Army infantry took Gdynia and Danzig. "Ours took the city center at Danzig," General Zymierski told me some time later, "and ran up the Polish flag over the Town Hall."

While the seasoned First Polish distinguished itself in battle, the Second Polish Army moved from its training camps and took over garrison duty in the large Polish cities. The garrisoning of such places as Lodz, Kutno, Poznań, Cracow, and Katowice was suitably entrusted to the Poles. Two months later the Second Polish went into its first battle, forcing the Niessa, under Marshal Konev, for the final drive on

Berlin. Mobilized and trained in nine months, they fought with a particular Polish dash and nonchalant gallantry.

"Our boys of the First went over the Oder and our boys of the Second went over the Niessa under heavy fire," said General Zymierski. "But they went as if on triumphal march, toasting victory in the river water as if in champagne. They stuck up little flags on the riverbanks and signs marked 'Here is the Polish frontier!' " Later Poles were among the first of Zhukov's forces entering Berlin.

As soon as Warsaw was liberated people began to return on foot or by cart from all directions. They sought for their homes and found them gone; there were only broken walls and heaps of rubble. They dug into cellars to pull out their pitiful possessions — broken tables, torn pillows, mattresses stained with blood. They stood in the streets stricken with grief. They wandered about seeking old familiar places. Nothing was left. Warsaw as a city existed no more. The Germans had spent four months very efficiently blowing it up.

What had once been one of the liveliest capitals of Europe was an almost uncanny desolation, worse than the lost Pompeii or an Assyrian excavation, because the human bits remaining were so recent. One could not go far in any street; all ways were blocked by barricades and fallen buildings. The Central Railway station had sunk into its blown-up tunnels; in

places it was below the level of the street. The Town Hall and Opera House were fragments of wall against the sky. The fine cathedrals, palaces, and historical monuments — the castle of old Polish kings, the memorials of King Zigmund, Copernicus, and Chopin — were only scrap and memory. Great factories once throbbing with a quarter of all Poland's industry were a useless tangle of twisted iron and broken brick. There was no water, no electricity, no gas. Even the sewers were clogged. Under the snow and deep in the debris-filled cellars were tens of thousands of corpses, many of which would rot to skeletons before they could be taken out.

On January 19th, two days after the freeing of the city, a parade of the Polish Army was held in the midst of the ruins. Infantry, artillery, and tanks passed before the hastily erected tribune and were reviewed by President Bierut, Prime Minister Osubka-Morawski, and Commander in Chief Rola-Zymierski. Several thousand people had already returned to Warsaw. They crowded around the tribune to cheer. Even flowers had been found in the midst of winter to adorn the occasion. A girl presented a bouquet to General Zymierski amid applause.

The government then inspected the ruins. In the court of the apartment house where Morawski had formerly lived were many graves marked with crosses, including a child's grave. Bierut's former apartment still stood, looted of its contents; it had been in the part of town that the Germans occupied toward the

end. A pile of underground literature hidden in the apartment had not been discovered by the Gestapo. After announcing the intention of moving the government to Warsaw as soon as possible, Bierut and Morawski left for a fortnight's inspection tour of the newly liberated land. Other leaders were sent to various cities to organize municipal governments. In most cases they returned to their home towns or to places in which they had long lived, but from which they had been forced by the German occupation.

I went to Warsaw with a group of Anglo-American correspondents early in February. It was the most difficult and uncomfortable trip I made at any time in Poland. The needs of the front had drained the country of transport; President Bierut told me that they had only five hundred autos and trucks in all Poland for civilian needs. Hundreds of thousands of people were moving by foot, bicycle, horse, or any possible vehicle back to the farms and the cities from which they had been driven. This moving of population crowded all living space to suffocation.

We reached Warsaw at five in the morning after an all-night winter ride in an open truck. Chilled and exhausted, we found no one expecting us and no available beds. Rooms had been reserved the previous evening but everyone assumed that we had stayed in Lublin; lack of civilian phone service had not permitted us to send word in advance. So our rooms had been given to President Bierut and Prime Minister Morawski who had returned from their tour of the

newly liberated western areas and who were probably more exhausted than we. I found them both with their two secretaries in one small unheated room in the emergency government hotel.

Bierut warned me: "We can guarantee you neither facilities nor transport. If you land in any Polish city you may have to remain several days or even weeks. We ourselves are trying to get transport to Lublin and are not certain when it can be arranged."

I looked up "my bed" in Stephanie's room but she had a strange officer temporarily quartered on her. She gave me her own bed for four hours, after which I moved to the government hotel, occupying a room with five correspondents, men and women mixed. It was so cold that when I tried to sleep in my sweater and padded overcoat under heavy hotel quilts I woke two hours later shivering, since the frost-damp quilts chilled even through the overcoat. There was no running water anywhere in the building and practically no sanitary arrangements functioned. An army electric power unit supplied one electric bulb per room — a concession to time-pressed officials working late into the night.

I felt my health oozing out after two days' tour of ruined Warsaw from this exhausting base. Millions of Poles were enduring even worse conditions, but it would help nobody for me to get pneumonia in a place without conveniences, with everybody occupied by the needs of the front. It was in the nick of time that we pulled out for Lodz, one of those cities that

the Red Army had taken practically intact. How startling to find the Grand Hotel well-heated, with hot and cold running water and a complete staff of servants, just as when I had stayed there for the American Friends' Service twenty-four years earlier, after the first World War. Opening my wardrobe I came upon the suitcase and literature of a certain Dr. Apfelbaum. One of the German economic rulers had left in too great a hurry to collect his things! Lodz hotels had catered to Germans such a short time before we arrived.

During three weeks in the Grand Hotel I daily saw cabinet ministers arriving from Warsaw, apparently to acquire offices and suites of rooms for their staff. They also had been to Warsaw and found it more than they could endure. They spoke of Warsaw as headquarters but not convincingly. I felt at the time that it could be a capital only symbolically. Warsaw was a heap of rubble where nobody could live and work. Lodz was convenient and comfortable.

After the first few days, though, Lodz was pretty hungry going. The German High Command, anticipating the retreat, had left the city with practically no food. Citizens were subsisting on their winter stores of potatoes, without meat, butter, milk, or even bread. Under the direction of Casimir Witaszewski, who had returned to his home town as emergency mayor, they were rounding up food from the countryside. But the rural areas were also in chaos. This part of Poland had been incorporated in the Reich, and

Polish lands had been given to German colonists who had cleared off Polish homes and combined several Polish farms to make an "adequate German farmstead." Now these Germans were fleeing and Poles were hiking back to farms whose livestock was scattered and where even the houses were often gone. Meanwhile the last three milk trucks of Lodz had gone to the front.

The birth-pangs of civil government behind a great front were dramatized by my friend Frank's story of his auto hunt in Torun. This young engineer — Okecki's assistant in the diplomatic car by which I first came to Lublin — was now chief of civil auto transport, desperately seeking trucks. At the risk of his life he went with nine armed men and a Russian liaison officer, hunting abandoned German autos in the immediate rear of the Red Army. For three days he found himself in No Man's Land, in a suburb of Torun by-passed by Zhukov and not yet taken by Rokossovsky. German forces were near but their position was unknown. Frank, with nine armed men, seized the suburb, organized a Polish militia from its inhabitants, located important warehouses, and posted guards. He found and requisitioned thirty auto trucks, but had to return to Lodz for the gasoline to bring them away.

Just as Frank finished his tale of triumph his Russian liaison officer burst into the room. After the first welcome he broke the news that the new military commandant of Torun had finally got round to his

suburb, commended the excellent militia guarding the military supplies and then relieved him, keeping twenty-eight of the trucks!

Frank's shoulders sagged for a moment but he gamely recovered. Slapping the captain on the back he said: "That's swell! Official commendation from the Red Army! That's more than they got in Lodz or plenty of big cities!" It was no secret that the first militia of Lodz had contained many gangsters and had to have a clean-up.

"And your thirty trucks?" I asked regretfully.

He disdained sympathy. "My twenty-eight trucks have gone to take Berlin! After Berlin we'll have trucks by the thousand."

While Frank accepted the loss of the trucks for the greater needs of the front and went right on working, making the most of his inadequate transport, one of his assistants was using the situation for his personal profit. Frank sent him to Lodz to organize transport in the first week of liberation. Coming by government truck, he used his sojourn to buy stockings from abandoned German stocks at a couple of *zlote* a pair. Selling them in Lublin where they rated a thousand *zlote* in the open market, he made a cool fortune in a week.

"I'll have him jailed when I get to Lublin," declared the outraged Frank.

"On what charge?" I queried. "Profit-making isn't forbidden in Poland. Maybe you can get him for improper use of your truck."

War offers golden chances for profiteers. Over a

brief space there were two currencies, one of which — the German mark — was rapidly losing all worth. There were two widely varying scales of prices, not to mention variations within each scale. Petty speculators found it profitable to beat their way from Lublin to Lodz, even if it took a couple of days, just to exchange a few pounds of butter from Eastern Poland for several pair of stockings from the west. They were pushing into the few freight cars as these began to travel on the repaired railroads. They were crowding out peasant refugees who were trying to go home to their farms. Such individualists were tearing apart the fabric of community life that others were painfully weaving. They were also the first to grumble at every act of government.

War also brings out patriotism. The Lodz electric light plant shut down the morning after the Germans left. The High Command had seen to it that there should be no coal. Lodz workers carried coal on their backs from their own apartment houses to get the city lights going again. Railway workers hastily repaired lines to Silesia to secure a steady supply. In Silesia the miners and transport workers went hungry for days, but they kept on mining coal and transporting it. Everywhere in liberated Poland were teachers, librarians, civil servants, and citizen-volunteers working all hours on enthusiasm instead of food, hiking long distances across the countryside to do some public work.

As these everyday patriots, these hard-working and

undemanding citizens, toiled to rebuild the shattered life of their communities and of their nation, it became more and more clear to everyone that the little group of leaders, cemented by six months' joint work in Lublin and forming now the Provisional Government, was holding together all those thousands who were holding together the land.

Soon I saw that all those officials who like myself seemed to have run away to Lodz or other comfortable cities were being pulled back to Warsaw remorselessly and irrevocably as the days went by. Some of them parked their families and some of the office staff in other cities where there was housing space, and where they themselves could sometimes come for a good night's rest and a bath. But Warsaw was their center. Warsaw was the capital not in a symbolic but in an actual sense. So I returned to Warsaw to find out why.

I returned in Witaszewski's auto — grabbing a seat in somebody's auto at fifteen minutes' notice was the only way one could travel in those days. He also was abandoning the comfort of a mayor's job in Lodz to set up headquarters for Poland's trade-unions in Warsaw. We followed a zigzag route through the ruined capital where streets had been cleared and marked by arrows. We crossed the Vistula just at dusk by the first new permanent bridge into Praga.

Never have I seen such an appalling mass of humanity as milled along that newly finished bridge,

carrying babies, rucksacks, doorframes, windows, kitchen utensils, chairs — the salvage from a hundred thousand ravaged homes. It was a nightmare of perpetual plodding in an eternal human traffic jam.

This great mass of misery moved weary but persistent, flooding eastward into overcrowded Praga. These were Warsaw citizens driven from their homes during the four months when the Germans were systematically destroying the city, exploding it, and burning it house by house. Coming home now they found the main city on the western bank destroyed; so they crossed the river to the Praga suburb to camp in cellars or to sleep on friends' floors. Every morning they went to the beloved ruins to dig and to salvage. Every night they came back to Praga to survive.

Why didn't the government settle in Lodz, in Cracow, in Katowice — all fine, big cities with office buildings, apartment houses, and hotels? I knew the answer now. Here and now in Warsaw was the ultimate battle for the unity of Poland's life. Hitler had determined to obliterate forever this central citadel of Polish history and culture. Hitler had destroyed physical Warsaw. But Warsaw wasn't dead. These wretched refugees were Warsaw. Warsaw was wounded but living as long as they returned to dig; but if they should scatter and take root in more comfortable cities, then Warsaw would really die. Never again could there be such will to rebuild as here and now. But nothing could make these hundreds of thousands stick to the hell they lived in unless the Polish

nation supported them as the heart of the nation's life.

Government came to Warsaw because the continuity of national life was more important than comfort, efficiency, or health. It came to defy and defeat the Nazi intent of destruction. It came because Warsaw was the center around which all Poland would rally. Already the citizens of Lodz and of Cracow were sending tribute gifts to Warsaw from their own hunger and need.

Warsaw was a government camped on a construction site in the midst of all the houseless refugees. Officials slept on springless cots, on tables, and on floors, ate once a day from some public kitchen and carried a chunk of bread around for the other meals. They took each day's necessary work in brief cases from one bare office to another. They were constantly repairing and constantly on the move.

At the moment the government headquarters was on Sneczia — Snow Street — in a gaunt four-story building set in seas of melting snow and mud. A couple of Polish soldiers at the entrance sent me splashing through slush to a wooden shack where I got a permit to enter the larger building. Rough wooden stairs led to crowded rooms where cabinet ministers and lesser civil servants sat on wooden stools at unpainted splintery tables. In a small kitchen on the second floor the motherly woman who had kept me supplied with milk at the dining room in Lublin now prepared, with the aid of three helpers, a daily

meal of soup, meat, potatoes, and rye bread. Government employees in the building managed to get to the kitchen sometime between twelve and three, and carried their own dinner on a plate to the tables where they worked.

I sought Acting Foreign Minister Berman. He had sent me word in Lodz that it was "time to come to Warsaw," thereby assuming some responsibility for finding me a bed. With a distraught look he said that the Polish Socialist Party was holding a week-end congress and had all the beds in the government hotel and most of the tables in the offices. I reassured him airily, stating that Stephanie had that extra cot for me and that probably the officer quartered on her had long since gone.

"I'm afraid you can't count on Stephanie," said Berman, with an embarrassed smile. "My wife and I are occupying that cot of yours and Stephanie has discovered her ten-year-old daughter, who is sharing her mother's cot." It was the first I knew of Stephanie's lost daughter; she had kept her troubles to herself. In the end I landed a comfortable berth at Democratic Party Headquarters — that house where we had had the banquet. Only eight or nine people stayed there in two fair-sized rooms.

Three times in two days I had occasion to call on Berman. Each time I found him in a different office. The third time I was delighted to see that he had a separate room with a real desk, two upholstered chairs for visitors, and a small table where somebody had just had tea.

"I see you keep one room for diplomats," I chaffed.

"This is President Bierut's office," said Berman, smiling. "He's ill, so I'm using it today."

Many of my old friends were in this building at Sneczia; others were scattered widely across Poland. Jan Wende and Dr. Skrzeszewski were off in Cracow, General Zawadzki was organizing Silesia, that lovable Okecki was in Danzig and Gdynia, building a great united port. I knew with a pang that I would never again meet all in one spot those friends I had learned to know in Lublin. The life that had been so close in the tiny dining room and the single Committee Building had gone out to the ends of the land. It would never all come together again.

I knew also that I myself had no further right to that crowded living-space in Warsaw, except briefly to learn of future plans. So I met with four architects and engineers of the city-planning board and they told me the stages the city's reconstruction must pass through.

The first need had been thoroughfares to bring in provisions. The first bridges over the Vistula had been built by the Red Army with the help of volunteer "Warsaw Rebuilder" brigades. On January 27th, ten days after the city's liberation, a railway bridge three fifths of a mile long already carried supplies to the front. Four days later when our group of correspondents first reached Warsaw, we found three temporary bridges for pedestrians and autos, laid on pontoons and on ice. When the ice broke in mid-February, the first permanent high-water bridge was ready for

general traffic. It was the one by which I had crossed with Casimir. At the same time, the "Warsaw Rebuilder" brigades, now on regular municipal pay roll, cleared a way through the Warsaw streets, which for months had been blocked by barricades and fallen buildings. The zigzag route our auto had followed was being changed daily, as more streets were cleared.

"This makes it possible for people camping in the ruins to walk to water and food. There are already fifty thousand registered as living on the western bank, besides those who daily cross to Praga."

I visited a typical family of thirteen people living in a broken bit of basement. They had stuck up an iron stove with makeshift stovepipe of different diameters. For light they had wedged one windowpane into a shattered wall. They had no hope of water or electric light for a long time to come.

"We cannot put in utilities for such scattered ruins," explained the architects. "We shall pipe water to central points from which they can carry it home. We must concentrate our first effort on the area where some decent living space can quickly be secured." Such an area lay south of the Allée Jerusalimska and about a mile from the river. Here were several streets of houses in relatively good shape where Germans had lived until their retreat. It was planned to reclaim here quickly a "government town" where forty thousand people — civil servants, their families, and the tradesmen serving their needs — could live comfortably and work efficiently. One grisly detail involved

clearing a sewer that was still clogged with a thousand corpses. Insurgents and civilians had been gassed by the Germans as they tried to escape from Mokotow to the river by the "sewer route."

"It will take two years' work by one hundred thousand men merely to clear away the ruins preparatory to building the new 'Greater Warsaw.' We expect German reparation labor for this. We are preparing a thousand portable barracks, each for one hundred laborers."

Staggered at the immensity of the clearance, I asked: "Wouldn't it be easier to build an entirely new city?"

They gave a negative reply. Warsaw's location is very desirable. Human beings have dwelt here since the days of neolithic man because of the satisfactory location – the best crossing of the Vistula, with dry approach from both sides, without swamps or other natural barriers. Today a network of railways and highways converges here; it is built already. This is no city site to discard.

"Then, too, the greatest cost of a city lies underground in sewers, water and gas mains, building foundations. These are little damaged and their value more than balances the cost of surface clearance. The ruins themselves contain much building material, right on the spot without transport, which is one of our limiting factors today. Moreover, our Russian friends, who have offered to bear half the technical work and material cost, have developed many new techniques in Stalingrad and other destroyed cities

for using partly broken walls that engineers formerly had to tear down. Already their estimates in many areas have doubled the number of walls that can be used again."

So they talked in their practical engineering phrases about reclaiming this great heap of devastation — perhaps the greatest single ruin on our planet — under which a hundred thousand corpses still lie. Calmly and thoroughly by the electric light of army field units in crowded basement offices, they planned over the dead of the past their future capital.

"It will be much better than before," they prophesied. "Prewar Warsaw expanded industrially in the nineteenth century when Poland was not an independent state. Factories, dwellings, and public buildings were mixed together; no provision was made for a really fine government center. We shall have both government and big industry in Warsaw, but in different sections: a great government center on the river, industrial regions further west along the railroads, residential areas north and south connecting with both government and industry across green park belts. The very completeness of the destruction makes our planning easier.

"Two years hence the future contour of Warsaw should be visible from an airplane, with ruins cleared and with green nursling trees marking boulevards and parks. Beyond that we cannot say how long it will take to build it. This depends on many things; not only on Poland but on all of our postwar world."

* * *

"We have forty-eight street lamps on the western bank in Warsaw," Ambassador Modzilewski boasted to me in the Polish Embassy in Moscow in May. "People can find their way at night through the ruins now."

After appropriate comment on the forty-eight lights, our talk turned to the international situation. Berlin had fallen. Polish troops together with the Red Army had set their standard in the enemy capital. The United Nations were meeting in San Francisco, where Poland's absence made her bitterly present in the discussions. In London the various groups of Poles in exile were going through successive government crises and party splits.

"Our problems in Poland are rather different. Not all of our cities are yet adequately supplied with bread. We have railroads to repair. We must get industry going. Transport is still a bottleneck. Last month our chief problem was to get the seed into the ground, to give the peasants land and thus incentive, to supply implements so that they could plow. We have sown successfully the greater part of our farm lands; with a fair harvest yield we shall get by. My own principal concern as ambassador — between all these diplomatic visits and operas that protocol demands — is the repatriation of some two million Poles from the USSR, chiefly from Western Ukraine and White Russia, but also refugees from as far away as Central Asia and Siberia.

"We have serious need for Polish unity and for many, many more efficient workers. We have no need

for people who renew old quarrels with the Russians or bring up the landlord question again. We must settle down to work."

"All Europe must settle down to work," I supplemented.

"Yes, Europe – and the world. But Europe cannot settle down unless Poland settles down. We are in the center of Europe. For long centuries any instability in Poland has disturbed stability in Europe. The greed of the Polish feudal lords for land and their shifting allegiances did more than disorient Poland; they provoked unrest throughout Europe. The pre-war pro-fascist policies of Joseph Beck gave the green light to the second World War. Poles who still support such policies are a chief threat to Allied harmony today. A stable, democratic Poland, friendly both to the USSR and to the Western Democracies, is vital not only to Poles but to world peace."

"A bridge between East and West," I ventured.

"No, no, not a bridge," he contradicted. "Say rather a comfortable home near the crossroads, hospitable to neighbors and to friendly visitors."

His simile was better. For a bridge is built to be trampled from both directions, but a home is an abiding place of kin.

CHAPTER XII

United They Stand

MUSIC from bands and flaunting banners transformed an open space in Warsaw's ruins Sunday morning July 1st, 1945. In the old theater square, now cleared of rubble, tens of thousands of cheering people formed in ranks. They flooded high up broken bricks and twisted iron that avalanched from the torn side of the City Hall. Still higher they climbed to perch on jutting ledge or iron girder for a first glimpse of the new "unity" government formed in Warsaw three days before.

I was one of scores of correspondents from the Allied nations – the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France – who flew in by special plane. The eyes of the world were on Warsaw this day. We knew it and the crowd in the square knew it. Half a dozen motion picture photographers also knew it, busily shooting their reels of film to record the moment for history.

Nearly a year had passed since the Committee of National Liberation had set up in Lublin the first *de facto* government on liberated Polish soil. The

forms of new Poland had been emerging; they have been described in this book. For five months the Provisional Government had functioned in Warsaw, recognized by the USSR. But Poland had remained an international problem, since the holdover government-in-exile in London, still recognized by Great Britain and the United States, continued to spread acrimony. This unsettled situation delayed Poland's internal reconstruction and was disturbing to everybody, especially when the end of the war released some 2,000,000 Poles on Allied controlled territory who could only get home through international agreement. After long months of discussion that agreement was at last attained.

The lines of settlement had been drawn in early February at the Yalta Conference. Far greater powers than Poland needed to see the "Polish question" settled for their own postwar tranquillity. The Big Three chiefs — Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill — had come to an agreement at the moment when the Red Army was liberating the last Polish area. As soon as the Warsaw Provisional Government should be expanded by "other democratic elements" from Poland and abroad — conditions being suggested by a Polish commission of the three big powers — full recognition was pledged by all to this enlarged and provisional government.

This new "Provisional Government of National Unity" was now established. The chief posts were still held by the men whose leadership I had observed

for nearly a year. Boleslaw Bierut was still president of the Rada. Edward Osubka-Morawski remained prime minister. As we gathered in the square for public introduction of the government, I saw many old friends described in this book. But there were also new faces — which made the government acceptable to Washington and London. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk had come from London to be vice premier and minister of agriculture. Jan Stanczyk, an old member of the PPS who came with him, was the new minister of labor. Stanislaw Grabski, aged individualist, once socialist, now conservative democrat, was one of the new vice-presidents of the Rada; another was the aged Vincente Witos, several times premier of postwar Poland, but because his health had been broken under the German occupation he was unable to attend this Warsaw event.

Members of the government, trailed by correspondents and motion-picture photographers, climbed to the second-story balcony of the half-demolished opera house and addressed the crowds in the square. All stressed the need for national unity, both for Poland's own reconstruction and to make Poland a link of harmony instead of discord among nations of the postwar world.

Under an iron-gray sky stood the listening people. The green banners of the Peasants' Party, the blue shirts with red ties of the Polish Socialist Party, rank on rank of the Polish Workers' Party with flags red on one side and white on the other. Off to the left I

saw the well-remembered women of the Wedel candy factory who had hiked all the way from Praga to be here. In decorated trucks around the crowd's fringes stood "Warsaw Rebuilder" brigades, reminding one that reconstruction of the ruined capital was steadily proceeding.

Everybody sang the national anthem, "Poland has not perished." Every speaker was cheered. Short heavy downpours of rain wilted banners but not the spirits of the people. They cheered the new arrivals from London, partly because of their personalities, and more because of the new unity their presence symbolized. Laughing girls in colorful national costumes, hung with strings of beads saved through nearly six years of occupation, clustered around ruddy, bald-headed, beaming Mikolajczyk. Stalwart youths of the Peasants' Party shouted, "Mi-ko-laj-czyk, Mi-ko-laj-czyk" in the dominating rhythm of a football cheer.

Whatever internal struggles for power might come later, the immediate moment was that of a honeymoon. The new government members were obviously glad to be home in Poland, and the rest of the government was glad to have them back.

"I'm asking all Poles, even those who've stood aside until now, to come out and work for the reconstruction of Poland." Mikolajczyk was bidding both for those who had supported the previous government and for those who had opposed it. And both factions were cheering him. Already the legend was spreading that it was he who had three times flown from Lon-

don to Moscow "to work for unity." Only the more sophisticated realized that his stubbornness had delayed agreement and that he could have been prime minister and saved Poland much hardship if he had accepted Bierut's offer nine months ago. It was late, but better late than never.

The great gain was that Poland was no longer a bone of international contention. There would be immediate recognition, stable relations with foreign countries, and economic relief.

The Unity Government snapped rapidly into action. Headquarters were already assigned to the new ministers in a gaunt, gray, war-battered building in Praga that for the moment housed the government. It had moved from shabby Snow Street quarters where I had seen it three months before. Its departments were expanding, outgrowing one building after another. Health, commerce, and communications already had newly repaired buildings on the western bank. Others would soon be moving over as more buildings were repaired.

We flew by plane on a tour of Poland. Everywhere — in Silesia, in Cracow, and northward to the Baltic — I met old friends from Lublin working now on a wider scale.

At Katowice I breakfasted with General Zawadzki. He was governor now of Upper Silesia — Poland's empire of coal and steel. Here Poland possesses, with former German Silesia added, the chief coal region

of Central Europe with reserves of sixty billion tons. The new governor expected Silesia to play a strategic and profitable role in saving Europe from famine as soon as enough coal cars could be unscrambled from somewhere in Germany, where the rolling stock of the entire continent was piled up.

"Within a week after we get enough cars we get full production," he told me. "Because of the Red Army's swift advance, combined with the watchful heroism of Polish miners, eighty great mines with a daily capacity of nearly a quarter million tons were taken intact. Many miners got decorations from the Polish Government for preventing Germans from flooding the mines."

In the midst of a score of knotty production problems, Zawadzki seemed younger and specially gayer than in Lublin. He laughed when I told him this.

"I'm a coal miner, and I'm home at last! I entered the army to free my country. I fought from Stalingrad to Silesia, and I rose from sergeant to general. But after we got Silesia free I didn't wait even to take Berlin. I asked the government to let me start mining coal." What a contrast to prewar Poland's "regime of colonels" was this general, who eagerly left his post as assistant commander in chief of the Polish Army to organize production for peace! "Shall I show you the coal mine where I got my start?" Zawadzki continued. "My old machine's not working, but it's still there."

So we drove through Pittsburgh-like valley coal and steel towns strung along interurban trolleys and came to the "Paris Mine," so named because it was formerly

owned by French capital. The miners have asked permission to rename it "General Zawadzki Mine," but the general told them, "What's your production? I've a reputation to maintain in Silesia. Can't have my name on a second-rate mine. Wait till you win first rating in the area; then come talk to me."

At the Paris Mine the miners surrounded him, and older miners who "knew him when" slapped him on the back, shouting, "We've second place in Silesia now; we've only the Renard Mine to beat!" Then they told him they had repaired his old machine and were using it again.

After that there was nothing to do but go down into the mine and inspect Zawadzki's machine. The general drove it back and forth, then dusted off his clothes, smiling. "Take note, I could still earn my living by honest toil if I had to."

"How long since you sat in that seat?" I asked him.

"Twenty-two years," he said; then added reminiscently, "Eleven of those years were in Polish jails for opposing Pilsudski's style of government."

On the way back from the mine Zawadzki showed me the gaunt local jail where that part of his career began, he said. When I asked him what party he had belonged to, his eyes twinkled. "The Democratic Party," he laughed. "We have four democratic parties now in Poland, but then there was only one!"

Three days I spent in that coal and steel empire, where there were some thirty corporations with a large admixture of foreign-capital-owned coal mines before the war. The Germans grabbed all of them,

compelling the foreign owners to sell out at German prices. They ran the mines with slave labor, including Russian and British prisoners of war. At Zawadzki's Paris Mine they had five hundred British slaves. Now the mines have passed as war booty to the direct ownership of the Polish state. Any non-Nazi owner who can make claim to his stock after all that has happened may get eventual consideration. This is the general policy in Eastern Europe in territories freed by the Red Army as the quickest way to liquidate Nazi ownership and get industry going again.

Silesian mines are divided into ten operational districts, each with a director, production manager, and business manager appointed by the minister of industry — our old friend Professor Hilary Minc. A workers' committee elected in each district has an advisory function in production and a controlling function in social services, including rationing.

"Food's a tough problem just now," said Zawadzki. "The Soviet Union and the Red Army have been feeding all Silesia for the past four months. After Poland's new harvest and after coal cars arrive here, Silesia will help to balance Poland's national budget. We have enough not only for Poland's industry but to sell coal to coal-hungry Europe. Sweden already negotiates! But our first export coal will be a free gift to the cities of Moscow and Leningrad!"

We drove through the ripening rye of former German Silesia where Polish peasants, transported from

eastern regions, were already settling onto the soil, previous farmers having been driven westward by the German armies. We met writers, poets, university folk of the ancient capital of Cracow, where antique churches, historic castle, and even monks and nuns in the narrow streets and markets seem never to have known the war.

Thence north we flew through changing sun and rain over checkered farms and woods and towns — spacious land — till, circling over the gray waters of the Baltic, we landed on the wet airport where five flags were flying: Polish, American, French, Russian, and British. We had come to the port of Gdansk — better known to the world as Danzig but now returned to the ancient name by which it was christened in the year 997 by the first Polish Christians arriving in these parts.

"Gdansk" meant "to Danes." It was the Polish entrance to the Danish sea world, where heathen Vikings, unchallenged masters, stormed all coasts from the westward British isles to eastern Novgorod. Today they show you — Poles love to show you such things — the old stone church at Oliva not far from the mouth of the Vistula where a Latin document on vellum conveys, with the papal blessing, seven villages free of all duties to the king or feudal lord, but bound to three days' labor weekly "for wharves of Gdansk."

That was the beginning. Three centuries later Teutonic knights came driving eastward, and Poland's long fight for the sea began. That thousand-

year fight is today crowned with victory. But both the old and the modern seaport lie in ruins. Hitler Youth gangs burned as the Red Army and the Polish Army came in.

In the midst of the blackened buildings I saw a four-story façade still standing aloof in the ashes with a gallant ship all carved in stone sailing from the topmost story into upper air. It was beautiful work of the sixteenth century, when the guild of free trading cities of many Baltic nations gave united allegiance to trade through the Hanseatic League. Near by stood a great stone gate, smoke-charred but indestructible, bearing an inscription in Latin: "Through this gate Polish wealth goes out to the world."

These date from the days when Columbus discovered America, when Britain began her seafaring, when commerce was fresh romance. Many centuries have died, but romance is still young in the soul of Okecki. Yes, Okecki, my old friend from Afghanistan by way of Lublin, whom I met on my first trip. He was governor now of the united port district: old Gdansk on the mouth of the Vistula, modern Gdynia fourteen miles up the coast, and the little seaside towns between.

We found him in a makeshift government building in Zoppot, a seaside resort midway between Gdansk and Gdynia. The harbor reconstruction chief had just been explaining: "It will take ten million truck days just to clear the ruins from Gdansk alone. But first we must concentrate on opening four harbor

slips — two in Gdansk and two in Gdynia. The Germans sank battleships right in the main channel, heavily mining them. But what worries us most are sixty-four big magnetic mines still unlocated — big brutes that can lie dormant many months and then explode when a ship passes over."

From all these worries we came to Okecki's office. And Okecki came in and found us waiting; twenty-five lined up in three long rows like a class waiting for the professor.

He blushed. He got embarrassed. He ran sensitive fingers through his white fluffy hair. Finally he appealed: "What do you want? You must be tired of ruins. Shall we go down to the sea?"

So we trailed along through the shabby little resort town, and some of the correspondents were saying, "What a funny old dope!" And my heart ached, because I liked Okecki and wanted him to make good. We went far out on a great pier where gamblers from the Casino used to stroll. They say it was the swellest gambling casino on the Baltic in Pilsudski's days; but the Casino hotel is now a military hospital. Anyway the sea was there and the sky was there, all flooded with the gold of the late northern sunset. And a long line of shore was there, dark green against the gold.

"Back there is Gdansk" — Okecki pointed south into the smoky dusk that hid the ruins — "our old river harbor that leads far into Polish land. And up there is Gdynia" — he pointed northwest into the sun-

set — "where we built a modern port with a railway running up the funny little Polish Corridor when the Germans took away Gdansk. But really it's all one great harbor." Sighing, he added, "It was a very bad dream we had these seven hundred years."

The summer sunlight lingers long in these latitudes. It must have been half an hour afterwards when the port engineer came, handing a paper to Okecki. He read it and smiled; then he turned to us with a new dignity.

"As of today our port opens. A trainload of Silesian coal arrived this morning — a gift of the Silesian miners to heroic Leningrad. And the port master just reported a Soviet ship safe in Gdansk harbor, while two Swedish ships wait outside.

"I couldn't tell you before," he apologized, "because I didn't know just what might happen. I was worrying about those mines. You see, we have a very great port, but to be quite sure it is a safe one — it will take quite a while.

"But now we have in the east our new friend Soviet Russia, without whom we never could have come back to this country. And now we are recognized again by our old friends from the west. There will be not only a great port; there will be also a great inland waterway from the Vistula to the Dnieper. Canals and highways and railways we will remake to fit our new connections: roads to Moscow, to Leningrad, to Kiev, to Paris, and cities in the west.

"Poland," he said, as we turned towards the darken-

ing shore, "lies right in the middle." I recalled that it was ancient China that first claimed to be the "middle kingdom" four thousand years ago. But I didn't remind Okecki, for to each man his homeland should be the "middle kingdom" of the world.

Poland indeed seems a fair enough center. Thanks to the land reform, one fifth of the total area of the country has been redivided and Poland has become a land of farmer-owners tilling their own soil. Thanks to the Red Army strategy, Poland has her coal and steel empire intact in the heart of Europe — a bigger industrial plant than she possessed before the war. Thanks to Soviet support and the acquiescence of the Western Allies, Poland has potentially the greatest seaport on the Baltic, connecting with her river waterways.

On our return to Warsaw we found Prime Minister Morawski more confident than I'd ever seen him. Eleven nations had recognized his government during the brief week we had been on our tour. He told us the Red Army was steadily withdrawing, and that nearly five million Poles who had been abroad would practically all want to come home. "We must get in our harvest and bring back our scattered people and hold our national elections."

It seems as if Poland has the first chance in her history for a well-balanced economy, for as much independence as is granted today to any nation, for as much prosperity, democracy, and all those other

words in political slogans as Poles themselves prove able to achieve and use. It will cost much labor, but Polish peasants know labor. It will take much planning, but when have Poles lacked plans? It will take patriotic devotion, but Poles are famous for this.

It will also demand unity such as Poles have never shown in history. Can they achieve it now?

The chance is there waiting – bought, as it was, with a great price.

Index

AFGHANISTAN, 29, 31, 32–33, 34
Altman, Henry, 65
America, 93, 134, 142, 149
American Friends' Service, 8, 180–181, 245
American Red Cross, 73, 132
Anders, General, 27, 28, 83, 106
Antityphus fight, 21, 231
Apfelbaum, Dr., 245

BALCERZAK, JANINA, 153
Banach, Professor, 21
Berlin, 241, 247
Berling, General Sigmund, 28, 100, 107, 226
Berman, Acting Foreign Minister, 252–253
Bertold, Edward, 65–66, 182–183, 231
Bessarabia, 192
Bialystok, 66, 230
Bienick, Vice-Minister of Agriculture, 179–180, 196–197, 199, 203
Bierut, Boleslaw, 4, 63, 82, 88–96, 101, 229, 232, 242, 243, 244, 253, 261
Boberska, Josefa, 52
Boleslaw, 197
Bolsheviks, 32
Bor, General, 129, 131, 137, 150–152, 154, 157–158, 159, 164, 175, 177, 178
Borecza, Editor, 40, 44, 85
Borowiec, Father, 66–67, 230
Boruv, 210
Boundaries, 22–23, 66, 182
Bug River, 108, 136, 226
Bydgoszcz, 239

CASIMIR, KING JAN, 198
Casimir the Great, King, 197
Catherine, Empress, 199
Chapayev band, 207
Chelm, 109, 119
Chiang Kai-shek, 30
Chopin, Frédéric, 242
Churchill, Winston, 3, 4, 8, 124, 142, 233, 260
Ciesluk, Henry, 62–64
Clemenceau, Georges, 27
Coal, 263–266, 271
Communists, 46, 47, 48, 206
Constitution, Polish, of 1921, 6, 94; of 1935, 6, 95
Co-operatives, 40, 83
Copernicus, 242
Cracow, 239, 240, 250, 251, 253, 263, 267
Crimea Conference, 7, 260

Criminals, war, 62–64
Cudny, Vincente, 142–143
Curie State University, 72, 231
Curzon, Lord, 22, 182
Curzon Line, 22–23, 182
Czechoslovakia, 66, 102
Czechowski, Casimir, 61
Czechs, 93
Czenstochowa, 238–239
Czernyakow, 161, 177
Czerwinski, Colonel Marian, 53, 110, 116, 117–118
Czerwinski, Mrs., 116, 117–118

DACZKO, HELENE, 63
Danzig, 239, 240, 253, 267–270
Davida, 214
Dembowski, Professor Jan, 23–25
Democracy, Polish, 24, 43–50, 121–122, 123
Democratic Party, 45, 134, 265
Denmark, 66
Dnieper River, 270
Dombrowski Brigade, 17, 137
Draft, army, 108–109, 113, 228
Dreiser, Theodore, 149
Dugouts, 110–112

EAST PRUSSIA, 43, 66, 103, 104, 154, 194, 195, 239
Eastern Poland, 22, 42, 156, 181, 248
Education, 69–71, 72–74, 141–142, 231
Elections, 48–49
Epidemics, 67–68

FARMING, 102, 103
Filipczyk, Josef, 26–29
First Polish Army, 5, 17–18, 28, 83, 106–126, 128, 129, 136, 143–149, 150, 152, 153, 157, 171–173, 175, 176, 195, 226, 228, 237, 240, 241, 242
First Ukrainian Army, 237
First White Russian Army, 237
Food, 56–57, 59–60, 139, 142–143, 227–228, 266
Forbert, Jean, 153, 159–160, 166–167, 168–169, 175
France, 4, 93, 229
Free Folk, 78

GDANSK, *See* Danzig
Gdynia, 240, 253, 268–269
Gedymin, Prince, 24
General Council of Trade-Unions, 65
German High Command, 245, 248
Gestapo, 62, 70, 77, 78, 234, 235, 243
Government, provisional, 7, 226–236, 249, 260–263; local, 114, 214–215
Government-in-exile, 5, 17, 92–94, 157–158, 206, 209, 228, 260. *See also* London Poles
Grabski, Stanislaw, 261
Great Britain, 4, 5, 93
Grosz, Colonel Victor, 123–126
Grzegorzewski, Dr. Edward, 72, 73, 74

Halka, 133
Hanseatic League, 268
Harriman, Averell, 3
Helene, 19–20
Herschenhorn, Dr. Szlema, 64
Hibner, Major, 18
Hitler, Adolf, 4, 94, 250
Holland, 66
Holy Spirit Asylum, 52
Home Army, 93, 99, 123–126, 137, 150, 157, 158, 163, 164, 165, 169–178 *passim,* 206–211 *passim,* 235
Housing, 56–57, 102
Hull, Cordell, 192

INDUSTRY, 102, 103–104, 242, 263–266, 271
Inter-Party Youth Committee, 232
Irak, 28
Iran, 28

JANUSZ, VICE-PRESIDENT, 71
Jaworska, Helene, 153, 231–232
Jendrychowski, Dr., 12, 51
Jews, 64–65, 129, 206, 239
Jugoslavia, 102, 192

KABUL, 31, 32, 33, 34
Katowice, 240, 250, 263
Katyn forest, 209
Khmelnitsky, Bogdan, 198
Kiev, 16
Knastrac, Professor, 21
Kolberg, 240
Konev, Marshal, 237, 238–239, 240
Konoplitza, Maria, 107
Kopij, Edmund, 147–148
Korczyk, General Wladislaw, 137, 153, 175–178
Kosciusko, Thaddeus, 18, 199, 200
Kosciusko Division, 28, 108
Krajowa Rada Narodowa. *See* National Council of Poland
Kropiwnicki, Major, 126
Kuszyk, Wladislaw, 53
Kutno, 240

LANCUT, 181
Land reform, 39, 65–66, 67, 113, 179–201, 217–222, 228, 271
Land Reform Bulletin, The, 189
Landlords, 182–183, 217–222
League of Nations, 30
Lenina, 108
Letz, Captain Stanislaw George, 77–81
Libraries, 75, 231
Lithuanians, 93
Lloyd George, David, 27
Lodz, 231, 235, 239, 240, 244–249 *passim,* 250, 251
Lodz Textile Workers, 53
Lomazy, 190
London Poles, 7, 124, 125–126, 132, 150–151, 170, 178, 228, 257. *See also* Government-in-exile
Lublin, 36–40, 53–54, 56–58, 61, 62, 64–65, 72, 128, 132, 139, 190, 199, 226, 227, 233, 248, 249, 259

Lublin City Council, 54
Lublin Committee. *See* National Committee of Liberation
Lublin Provincial Council of Trade-Unions, 53
Lvov, 20–21, 22–23
Lvov University, 20, 21, 231

McDONALD, MR., 30
Maidanek, 16, 25–26, 41, 54, 55, 87, 91
Marymont, 172
Mazur, Professor Stanislaw, 20–23, 24
Mazurs, 43
Meluch, Captain, 209–210
Meyer, Rabbi, 65
Miaow-101, 146–147
Mijal, Casimir, 235
Mikolajczyk, Stanislaw, 4, 33, 61, 88, 94–95, 152, 157, 158, 261, 262
Milanow, 220
Minc, Dr. Hilary, 51, 101–105, 230, 266
Minsk-Masowetski, 52
Modlin, 156
Modzilewski, Captain, 12, 257–258
Mokotow, 161
Morawski, Edward. *See* Osubka-Morawski, Edward
Morzycki, Dr. George, 67–69, 231

NSZ. *See* National Armed Forces
Narew River, 155, 237
Narodowe Sily Zbrogne. See National Armed Forces
National Armed Forces, 77, 78, 125, 126, 210
National Committee of Liberation, 4, 7, 12, 37, 38, 39, 50–53, 56–58, 82–83, 88, 91–92, 122, 125, 126, 158, 180, 226–227, 259
National Council of Poland, 5–7, 61, 99, 107, 122, 179, 210, 223, 226–227, 229–236, 261
New Deal, 227
New Warsaw Symphony Orchestra, 132–134
Niessa River, 103, 104, 240, 241

OCHOTA, 159, 160, 161
Oder River, 103, 104, 239, 241
Okecki, M., 29–35, 44, 57–58, 253, 268–271
Old Town, 153, 159–160, 161, 164–166, 168
Oliva, 267
Orlicz, Professor, 21
Orlowski, Stanislaw, 52
Osubka-Morawski, Edward, 4, 82–90, 100, 101, 229, 230, 242, 243, 261, 271

PPR. *See* Polish Workers' Party
PPS. *See* Polish Socialist Party
Paskiewicz, Anthony, 42
Peasants' Battalions, 124, 125, 211, 235

INDEX

Peasants' Commission of Radzyn County, 179
Peasants' Party, 44–45, 61, 67, 124, 211, 235, 261
People's Army, 6, 77, 99, 124, 125, 152, 154, 159, 163, 165, 169, 170, 174, 176, 178, 209, 210, 211, 226, 235
People's Guard, 235
People's Militia, 235
Piech, Wanda, 52
Pilsudski, Marshal, 23, 97, 199, 200, 269
Piotrkow, 61; Statutes of, 198
Podzamcze, 183–184, 187, 188
Polish Communist Party, 47
Polish Corridor, 270
Polish General Staff, 38
Polish Legions, Pilsudski's, 97
Polish Republic, 36
Polish Socialist Party, 45–46, 84, 85, 211, 235, 252, 261
Polish Socialist Party Battalion, 165
Polish Telegraph Agency, 12
Polish Workers' Party, 44, 46–48, 211, 235, 261
"Polonaise" (Chopin), 133
Polpress. *See* Polish Telegraph Agency
Pomerania, 104, 189, 195, 239, 240
Pomorzk Wall, 240
Poniatowski Bridge, 143, 145
Population, 22, 68, 102, 205
Potapczyk, Marian, 204–209, 210–215, 216–217, 223, 224, 225
Potapczyk, Mrs., 204
Potocki, Graf, 181–182
Poznań, 140, 240
Praga, 54, 71, 108, 127–132, 137, 138–143, 150, 151, 155, 156, 176, 234, 240, 249–250
Profiteering, 247–248
"Protocol Number Three," 207
Pruszkow, 131, 163
Pulawski, Casimir, 199
Pulawy, 108, 136, 137

RABE, DR. WACLAW, 60, 72–74, 231
Rada Narodowa. *See* National Council of Poland
Radas, county and district, 6
Radom, 237, 238
Radoslaw, Colonel, 177
Radzyn, 153, 180, 196, 202–225, 226
Radzyn County Rada, 215, 217
Railway Workers' Congress, 84
Rawicz, Colonel Leon, 157
Red Army, 5, 6, 20, 36, 38, 45, 46, 55, 79, 92, 100, 106, 107, 108, 113, 125, 128, 129, 135, 137, 138, 150, 154, 155, 156, 157, 163, 170–174, 212, 219–220, 226, 228, 236, 238, 239, 240, 245, 247, 253, 257, 271
Reparations, 103
Repatriation, 257
Resorts, 39, 40
Rockefeller Foundation, 23, 74, 231

Rocket bombs, 127, 128
Rokossovsky, Marshal, 171, 172, 237, 239, 246
Rola-Zymierski, General Michal. *See* Zymierski, General Michal
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 134, 142, 192, 227, 233, 260
"Rota," 107
Rudenecz, 220
Rumania, 192
Russia. *See* Soviet Union
Rydz-Smigly, General, 97
Rzeczow, 189
Rzeczow District Rada, 66, 230
Rzeczpospolita, 40
Rzmowski, Vincente, 133, 134

San Francisco, 257
Sandomir, 237
Schools. *See* Education
Second Polish Army, 109–121, 240–241
Second White Russian Army, 237
Security Corps, 157
Sedlice, 189
Serniki, 191
Sewernuwka, 207
Sewers, Warsaw, 167–169
Siewiec, Father, 52
Sikorski, General, 97, 98
Silesia, 27, 104, 248, 253, 263–264, 266
Sinclair, Upton, 149
Skierbieszow, 191
Skrzeszewski, Dr. Stanislaw, 69–71, 231, 253
Snow, Ed, 16
Soldier in Battle, 78
Sommerstein, Dr. Emil, 64
Southern Poland, 237
Soviet Union, 4, 5, 46, 93, 95–96, 102, 104, 182, 229, 257, 258, 260, 270
Spain, revolution in, 17
Speculation, 60
Spychalski, General Marion, 127, 134, 135, 138, 140, 153, 154, 156, 158, 176, 230, 233, 234–236
Stalewawola Steel and Munitions Works, 54, 182
Stalin, Joseph V., 3, 6, 95, 100, 260
Stanczyk, Jan, 261
Stare Miasta. *See* Old Town
Starzynski, Mayor, 128
Stephanie, 129, 132, 135–141, 152, 175, 244, 252
Stettin, 239, 240
Strachelski, George, 67, 230
Stronnictwo Ludowe, 44
Struzik, Mayor, 191, 194
Suwalki, 67
Szaniawski, Colonel, 153, 159, 164–166, 168, 169–172, 173–175, 176, 203, 223
Szytnik, 191

Tarnopol, 77, 78–79
Teachers' Union, 70
Thirty Years' War, 102
Time, army and civilian, 109
Torun, 239, 246
Trade-unions, 40, 48, 53–56, 130, 231, 249

Trials, of war criminals, 62–64
Typhus, 67–69, 78–79

UNRRA, 73, 132
USSR. *See* Soviet Union
Ukraine, 93, 162, 197, 198
Union of Polish Patriots, 20, 29, 32, 70
Union of Young Fighters, 165
United Nations, 257
United Nations Conference, 7

V-2s, 127, 128
Versailles, Treaty of, 22, 27, 182
Vilno, 23, 24–25
Virtuti Militarii Cross, 151
Vistula River, 108, 128, 136, 145, 150, 154, 156, 157, 237, 239, 240, 249, 253, 270
Voting, 48–49

WACHNOWSKI, COLONEL, 173
War Cripples' Congress, 84
Warsaw, 127–149, 226, 234, 259; uprising, 150–153, 157–178; liberation, 240, 241–245, 249–252; rebuilding, 253–257
Warsaw Institute of Hygiene, 69, 231
"Warsaw Rebuilder" brigades, 253, 262
Warsaw Shield, 155
Washington Allée, 143
Wasilewska, Wanda, 20, 31, 34
Wedel candy factory, 129–132, 262
Weigel, Professor, 21
Welker, Captain, 16–18, 26
Wende, Jan Karol, 74–77, 86, 87, 152, 156, 231, 253
Wertzer, Peter, 25
Weslaw, Secretary, 47
Western Ukraine, 22, 42, 257
White Russia, 42, 257
Wislica, Statutes of, 197
Witaszewski, Casimir, 53, 54, 55, 56, 231, 245, 249
Witos, Vincente, 261
Wola, 159, 160, 161
World War I, 199
Wychrzycki, Frank, 31, 34, 246–247

YALTA CONFERENCE, 7, 260
Youth Union of Struggle, 235

ZAMOSC, 54, 192–194
Zaorski, Jan, 217–222
Zawadzki, General Alexander, 121–123, 231, 253, 263, 264–266
Zelent, Stanislaw, 25–26
Zeligowski, General Lucian, 151
Zemlyankas, 110–112
Zenon, Sergeant, 153, 164, 173
Zhukov, Marshal, 237, 238, 239, 241, 246

Zigmund, King, 242
Zoliboz, 154, 161, 164, 166, 169, 170, 175, 176, 177
Zoppot, 268
Zymierski, General Michal, 61, 96–101, 108, 124, 150, 151–152, 155, 156, 157, 209, 230, 240, 241, 242
Zywiciel, Lieutenant Colonel, 170, 173–174

The author of this book was the only Western correspondent to enter Poland during the period of the Russian liberation of that country. She gives the first eyewitness account of what has happened and is happening inside Poland—How the people survived both the war and the German policy of extermination, where they stood in the battle for political supremacy between London and Lublin. Miss Strong's report tells a story unknown to Westerners, whose information has usually come from the London regime.

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The significance of Miss Strong's picture of Poland during the past year is her feeling that "Poland offered the sharpest example of problems facing all Europe. How can new governments be created out of the chaos left by the Nazis? How can they unite their people into democratic states?"

ANNA LOUISE STRONG

ANNA LOUISE STRONG was born in 1885 in Friend, Nebraska. Her father was a Congregationalist minister, and her mother had been one of the early women college graduates. She herself was the youngest woman ever to have received a Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago. In 1908 she turned from academic study to an active career in child welfare work. After a period on the local school board she became in 1918 feature editor of the *Seattle Union Record,* a trade-union newspaper. In 1921 she went to the Soviet Union as member of a relief mission. Since then she has lived for long periods of time in Russia, acting as correspondent first for *Hearst's International Magazine,* later for the North American Newspaper Alliance. She started the *Moscow Daily News* in 1930 and two years later married a Russian, Joel Shubin. She has lectured at Wellesley, Smith, Vassar, Columbia, and Stanford. Her long list of books includes a volume of poems under the title SONGS OF THE CITY (1906); THE ROAD TO THE GREY PAMIR (1930); an autobiography, I CHANGE WORLDS: THE REMAKING OF AN AMERICAN (1935); THE SOVIETS EXPECTED IT (1941); a novel, WILD RIVER (1943); and I SAW THE NEW POLAND (1946).

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